



ORR Accessible Travel Stakeholder Forum

26 March 2025

Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees

Name		Organisation
1	Sarah Robinson	Office of Rail and Road (ORR, Chair)
2	Stewart Hill	Office of Rail and Road (ORR)
3	David Kimball	Office of Rail and Road (ORR)
4	Jacqui Russell	Office of Rail and Road (ORR)
5	Will Sanderson	Office of Rail and Road (ORR)
6	Niki Glazier	Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC)
7	Simon Watkins	Mobility Access Committee for Scotland (MACS)
8	Malcolm Ramsay	National Autistic Society
9	Erik Matthies	Royal National Institute of Blind People
10	Megan Barnett	Transport for All

Apologies were noted from Stephen Brookes (Disability Rights UK), Sharlene Wright (National Autistic Society) and Emma Vogelmann (Transport for All).

Agenda

Item no.	Time	Topic
1	10:30-10:40	Welcome and introductions
2	10:40-11:10	Benchmarking operators' performance on passenger assistance
3	11:10-11:20	Refreshment break
4	11:20-11:40	Handover protocol project
5	11:40-11:45	Update on issues with specific operators
6	11:50-12:00	Roundtable updates and AOB

Meeting summary

Sarah Robinson began by welcoming the Forum members.

Will Sanderson then presented a slide outlining how ORR had used the Forum's input from the previous meeting across three projects relating to the handover protocol, the reliability of help points and assistance benchmarking. This is set out below:

Project	Feedback received	ORR action
Handover protocol project	Resourcing is a key factor in operators' compliance with the handover protocol.	A new section of four questions was added to our information request to operators about resourcing and we asked about this on all site visits.
Reliability of help points	General concern around reliance on freephone numbers where staff or help points not available, as disabled passengers less likely to have a mobile phone or be willing to use it.	In our report we highlighted that a freephone number was not a suitable alternative for all passengers, citing ONS data around smartphone possession for disabled and older people.

Project	Feedback received	ORR action
Reliability of help points	Passengers need to be made aware of what help points are for and how to use them.	We considered this in our analysis, resulting in a recommendation to improve the quality of communication about the purpose of help points and how to use them.
Assistance benchmarking	Draft category names are unclear.	These were reconsidered ahead of the consultation and will be looked at again in light of responses received.
Assistance benchmarking	Scoring should be kept simple.	This was taken into account in the framework's development ahead of the consultation and will be looked at again in light of responses received.

Benchmarking operators' performance on passenger assistance

David Kimball introduced the first item on ORR's work to develop an assistance benchmarking framework for operators. An overview of proposals, recently [consulted](#) upon, was shared, and the Forum were reminded of the framework's aims. These are to strengthen ORR's ability to hold operators to account for poor performance, and to drive improvements in the provision of the Passenger Assist service. To achieve this, it has been proposed that the framework will assess operators' performance in delivering assistance and their capability to improve.

It was reported that the consultation had received good engagement, with responses from a range of stakeholders including organisations, individuals, and train and station operators. An outline of the key themes in responses was shared, before members were asked for their feedback on some aspects that were raised by consultation respondents.

The Forum was asked to consider the risks around any benchmarking exercise highlighting areas of poor performance and this potentially affecting passengers' confidence to travel. Members felt that whilst this was a risk, it was more important to provide transparent information about performance and any risk should be accepted to achieve the benefits that benchmarking could bring. Members also noted the

importance of passengers being able to plan ahead, and having an understanding of operators' performance was a relevant consideration in this.

The Forum felt that assessment should not account for factors outside an individual operator's control. While there was sympathy for operators here, it was noted that requirements continue to apply to operators even if disruption has occurred for example, and that in such circumstances they should be ensuring passengers have all the information and assistance they need.

The last area that members fed back on was that qualitative areas should be benchmarked, and that best practice could be shared in addition to help those who were assessed as being weaker in this area.

ORR will publish its response to the consultation later during the spring.

Handover protocol project

Stewart Hill introduced the second item, updating on ORR's project looking at the operation of the handover protocol at five busy stations, having previously consulted the Forum on the project's method and approach. Under ORR's [ATP Guidance](#), staff at a boarding station must contact a staffed destination station by phone when they assist someone onto a train, and these requirements are set out in a handover protocol.

The five stations selected were Birmingham New Street, Bristol Temple Meads, Crewe, London Kings Cross and Manchester Piccadilly. This project aims to reinforce industry's focus on the handover protocol and achieve a positive impact for passengers at the in-scope stations and beyond. It is also intended to gather a clearer understanding of working practices to inform ORR's considerations of applications to use alternatives to the handover protocol and to establish good practice and potential challenges of relevance to other stations and operators.

Having completed site visits and received responses to information requests, the Forum was taken through the emerging findings and recommendations. Members were supportive of these.

Members were then asked for their views on operators moving towards alternative processes or technology in place of the handover protocol, such as using the Passenger Assist staff mobile app's electronic handover functionality. It was felt that safeguards for ensuring information has been acknowledged were essential, as is built into the electronic handover. Members also suggested that the experiences of early

trials of the electronic handover should be shared with others to help overcome challenges and share best practice.

Update on issues with specific operators

Sarah Robinson updated the Forum on our engagement with Eurostar in late 2024, which resulted in ORR [approving](#) a material change to its Accessible Travel Policy. This change reflected Eurostar's commitment to always look to assist passengers in their own wheelchair, provided that it was in a good state of repair and working normally – with explanation provided about what this looked like.

Stewart Hill then shared an update on ORR's ongoing engagement with Northern Trains on its delivery of assistance. ORR [requested](#) an improvement plan in September 2024, which we [accepted](#) in December. Northern Trains is now being held to account against the plan. ORR is using frequent meetings with Northern Trains and its reporting to monitor the delivery of its identified actions. Once all actions are complete, we will assess their impact on assistance performance.

Roundtable update

Closing the session, Sarah Robinson provided members with the opportunity to provide updates on their organisation's work to the rest of the Forum, as outlined below:

- RNIB – will be publishing the findings of a survey on rail travel in the coming months, and will share this with the rest of the Forum.
- DPTAC – a number of new members have joined, with improved representation of non-visible disabilities.
- Transport for All – will shortly be publishing a report on concessions.
- National Autistic Society – offer of assistance to the Forum regarding autism or non-visible disabilities.
- MACS – shared news about a one year pilot of entitlement card to allow one person travelling with a visually impaired passenger to travel for free.

AOB

No further business needed addressing and the meeting closed at 12:00. The next meeting will be held in September/October 2025, and members will be contacted to confirm availability.

END