

NOTICE IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 55(6) OF THE RAILWAYS ACT 1993 (AS AMENDED) OF THE OFFICE OF RAIL AND ROAD'S DECISION NOT TO MAKE A FINAL ORDER, OR MAKE OR CONFIRM A PROVISIONAL ORDER, IN RELATION TO NORTHERN TRAINS LIMITED'S CONTRAVENTION OF CONDITION 5 OF ITS STATION LICENCE AND GB STATEMENT OF NATIONAL REGULATORY PROVISIONS: PASSENGER

3 March 2026

1. This document constitutes a notice issued by the Office of Rail and Road ("ORR") published in accordance with section 55(6) of the Railways Act 1993, as amended, ("the Act") stating that:
 - a) ORR is satisfied that Northern Trains Limited ("Northern") is contravening condition 5 of its Station Licence and GB Statement of National Regulatory Provisions (GB SNRP: Passenger), which requires Northern to establish and comply with an Accessible Travel Policy ('ATP'). In particular, Northern has failed, and is failing to comply with commitments made in its ATP to provide disability awareness training for staff and to provide the management and oversight arrangements that would support and assure delivery of that training, as more particularly set out in this notice.
 - b) ORR has decided not to make an order under section 55 of the Act because:
 - i. Northern has agreed to take and is taking all such steps as appear appropriate to ORR for Northern to take for the purposes of securing or facilitating compliance with condition 5 of its Station Licence and GB SNRP: Passenger. In particular, on 17 December 2025, Northern set out an improvement plan with the stated objective of delivering compliance with condition 5 of its Station Licence and GB SNRP: Passenger. The plan sets out 23 actions across four themes: review governance controls and reporting; define role-based training requirements; address retrospective gaps; update induction, onboarding and refresher training.

- ii. ORR does not consider it appropriate to make an order because it is satisfied that an order would not deliver a better result than would be achieved by implementing delivery of Northern's improvement plan.

Background

2. This notice follows an investigation into Northern's compliance with commitments made in its ATP relating to disability awareness training. In 2024, Northern agreed a passenger assistance improvement plan with ORR designed to tackle poor performance in delivering reliable passenger assistance and Northern made good progress in delivering the actions it set out in its plan. However, in August 2025 new reporting requirements for all operators revealed that around 800 Northern passenger facing staff had not received disability awareness training. This gap had not been identified or addressed in the passenger assistance improvement plan.
3. Despite Northern taking action in October 2025 to deliver training to station staff, given the concerns previously raised, ORR wrote to Northern on 4 December 2025 initiating an investigation into Northern's compliance with condition 5 of its GB SNRP: Passenger and Station Licence.
4. The investigation considered the following:
 - a) The timeframe over which staff who had not received required disability awareness training were interacting with disabled passengers, and the scale and impact of the issue.
 - b) The circumstances that led to staff not receiving training when required and how the issue remained unresolved and unreported during this timeframe.
 - c) How Northern could assure itself, its passengers and ORR that:
 - i. the recent training has been effective and is enabling staff to meet the required training outcomes; and
 - ii. a similar situation will not arise in future.
5. The investigation also considered:

- a) the steps Northern has taken or is taking to address the issues, make improvements;
 - b) whether there are any systemic issues; and/or
 - c) whether there are any mitigating factors which should be considered.
6. ORR considered information provided by Northern as part of this investigation and as part of ORR discharging its regulatory functions. In particular, ORR has analysed whether the improvement plan provided on 17 December 2025 adequately addresses the concerns identified. Northern has also offered a suite of reparations as part of the investigation. ORR is publishing its investigation report alongside this notice, which details the assessment of evidence that ORR has undertaken in arriving at its decision.

Relevant Legal Provisions

Condition 5

7. Condition 5: Accessible Travel Policy in the GB SNRP: Passenger states:
“The SNRP holder shall establish and thereafter comply with:
- (a) a statement of policy; and*
 - (b) a detailed body of arrangements, procedures, services and other benefits to be implemented or provided by the SNRP holder,*
- designed to protect the interests of people who are disabled in their **use of trains** operated by the SNRP holder and to facilitate such use (together the “ATP”).”*
8. Condition 5 of the Station Licence is identical except it refers to stations rather than trains.
9. Operators can only establish, or make material changes to, their ATP with approval from ORR, and each operator is held to account against the commitments they make in their approved ATP.

10. Northern's current ATP includes the following commitments, which have been present and remained consistent since 2021 when Northern's ATP was first introduced:

a) Staff training (Northern ATP p30)

- i. Northern commits that: *'All new staff receive disability awareness training as part of their corporate induction, while all existing staff including senior managers and leadership team, receive refresher training at least every two years'*.
- ii. Northern's ATP also states that: *'The Office for Rail and Road (sic) have set out in their guidance nine mandatory training outcomes..., which our training includes...'*

b) Strategy and management (Northern ATP p24)

- i. Northern commits to *'Ensure our staff have the resources, skills and confidence to deliver assistance to customers'*, and to *'Measure the success of our Accessible Travel Policies'*.

c) Monitoring and evaluation (Northern ATP p25)

- i. Northern commits to *'...regularly review this policy and a report on findings will be sent to the DfT and the ORR. This will include...any difficulties we have encountered with the implementation of this policy.'*

The Contravention

11. ORR is satisfied that Northern is contravening condition 5 of its Station Licence and GB SNRP: Passenger by failing, to comply with the commitments made in its ATP, as set out at paragraph 10 above, to provide disability awareness training for staff and to provide the management and oversight arrangements that would support and assure delivery of that training.

12. Several areas of concern and deficiencies were identified. These include the following:

- a) Induction training for station staff has only been provided since late 2023 and the evidence indicates that most station staff did not have access to

disability awareness refresher training until 2025. Northern has therefore not been fully complying with the commitments set out in its ATP to provide disability awareness training for station staff since its ATP was first established in 2021.

- b) An internal audit carried out by Northern in December 2025 identified a number of systemic issues relating to governance processes, monitoring and controls as key issues that led to the failure to deliver training to staff. Northern did not make ORR aware of gaps in provision of disability awareness training until it reported data under new reporting requirements in August 2025.
- c) Staff at Northern's ten busiest stations received training that addressed some of the mandatory training outcomes in 2025, as part of Northern's Passenger Assistance improvement plan, and disability awareness refresher training was delivered to station staff across Northern's network in October 2025. Whilst the training went a significant way towards closing the training gap for station staff, a gap remains for some staff with respect to one of the mandatory training outcomes (outcome 9), which Northern aims to resolve by July 2026. There is therefore an ongoing issue.
- d) In addition, until systemic issues relating to governance processes, monitoring and controls are addressed, there is ongoing risk that similar issues with disability awareness training could re-occur.
- e) Northern has set out actions that it has agreed to take and is taking aimed at resolving the systemic issues, the majority of those actions are to be completed by the end of March 2026 and the full plan is to be largely delivered by the end of July 2026.

Section 4 of the Act

13. ORR must exercise its functions (including its enforcement function) in the manner which it considers best calculated to achieve a series of duties set out at section 4 of the Act.

Section 55 of the Act

14. Section 55(1) of the Act obliges ORR to make a final order if it is satisfied that a licence holder is contravening, or is likely to contravene, any condition of its licence.
15. Section 55(2) of the Act provides that ORR must instead make a provisional order where it appears it is requisite to do so. In determining if it is requisite, ORR must have regard, in particular, to the extent to which any person is likely to sustain loss or damage in consequence of anything which is likely to be done, or omitted to be done, before a final order can be made.
16. Any enforcement order must contain such provisions as is requisite for the purpose of securing compliance with the relevant licence conditions.
17. The obligations to make an enforcement order contained in sections 55(1) and 55(2) of the Act are subject to a number of exceptions, as follows:
 - a) section 55(5) of the Act provides that ORR must not make an order if it is satisfied that the duties imposed upon it by section 4 of the Act preclude making an order;
 - b) section 55(5A) of the Act provides that ORR shall consider whether it would be more appropriate to proceed under the Competition Act 1998 and section 55(5AA) of the Act provides that ORR must not make an order if it considers that it would be more appropriate to proceed under the Competition Act 1998; and
 - c) section 55(5B) of the Act requires that if ORR is satisfied that:
 - i. the relevant operator has agreed to take, and is taking, all such steps as it appears to ORR for the time being, to be appropriate for it to take for the purpose of securing or facilitating compliance with the condition or requirement in question; or

- ii. the contravention or apprehended contravention will not adversely affect the interests of users of railway services or lead to any increase in public expenditure;

it shall only make a final order if it considers it appropriate to do so.

18. ORR does not consider it is requisite to make a provisional order as it does not consider that any person is likely to sustain loss or damage in consequence of Northern's contravention before a final order can be made.

19. ORR does not consider that the exception in section 55(5) of the Act applies. ORR is satisfied that its section 4 duties do not preclude the making of an order.

20. ORR has considered whether it would be more appropriate to proceed under the Competition Act 1998 and does not consider that the exception in section 55(5AA) of the Act applies. In this case, ORR does not consider that Northern's failure to comply with its ATP could amount to an infringement of the Competition Act 1998.

21. ORR does, however, consider that the exception in section 55(5B) applies because:

- a) Northern has agreed to take, and is taking, all such steps as it appears to ORR to be appropriate for the purpose of securing or facilitating compliance with condition 5 of its station licence and GB SNRP: Passenger.

- b) In particular, Northern's improvement plan of 17 December 2025 had the stated objective of delivering compliance with Condition 5 (ATP) of its licences, and outcomes that all staff will have received the required Disability Awareness training and will be able to provide a better service to its customers.

- c) The improvement plan sets out 23 actions across four themes, with timescales for delivery, including:

- i. Review governance controls and reporting

Northern has established a new Governance framework for overseeing disability awareness training, and defined responsibilities and processes for recording training. This means that four of the seven actions in this section of the plan are complete. The three outstanding actions are due for end of March and include reviewing contractual requirements relating to training requirements for agency staff.

ii. Define role-based training requirements.

Northern has completed mapping of station roles and their training needs, which completes two of the three actions in this section. By the end of February they planned to complete a gap analysis to inform future training plans.

iii. Address retrospective gaps.

The actions in this section focus on delivering training and using feedback loops to improve training quality. They include the delivery of ramp training, which is due for July 2026, and creation of a BAU process for release of station staff for training delivery, which is due for April 2026.

Northern has identified the highest risk to delivery of the plan as release of staff for training. While refresher training will not now fall due until 2027, this is a key issue to resolve. Northern has provided some reasonable mitigations for delivering training should release not be agreed. Overall, of eight actions in this section, one has been completed, three are due by end March 2026, two by end July 2026, one by end March 2027 and one is ongoing

iv. Update induction, onboarding and refresher training.

Northern has completed a review of its training materials against Condition 5 of its Station Licence and GB SNRP: Passenger. The three outstanding actions are due by end of March 2026, and all relate to review of induction and refresher training content. There is a fifth ongoing action to engage with other train operating companies to review training content and to obtain independent views to validate quality.

- d) Of the 23 actions in the improvement plan, eight were to be delivered by end January 2026 and are now complete. Two actions are ongoing and now underway. A further eleven actions are due by end March 2026, with all but one action complete by end July 2026. The early progress indicates commitment to delivering the plan by Northern. Northern have also identified accountable senior individuals for delivery of the actions.
- e) ORR has assessed the plan and considers it to be comprehensive and well-targeted at tackling systemic issues relating to governance, oversight and delivery of disability awareness training. The actions set out, once delivered, offer confidence that Northern will be able to meet, and demonstrate that it is meeting, the commitments set out in its ATP relating to delivery of disability awareness training for staff and provision of the management and oversight arrangements to support and assure delivery of that training. Northern has committed to regularly report progress to ORR.
- f) For the reasons set out above, ORR does not therefore consider it appropriate to make an order because it is satisfied that an enforcement order would not deliver a better result than would be achieved by implementing in full the plan.

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