

ORR Assisted Travel Advisory Group

Meeting 1.

5th June 2018, One Kemble Street, London, WC2B 4AN



Attendees

Assisted Travel Advisory Group:

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| Fiona Walshe | Department for Transport |
| David Mapp | Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee |
| James Taylor | Disability Charities Consortium |
| Michael John Priolet | Network Rail |
| Crispin Humm MBE | Rail Delivery Group |
| Phil Wilks | Transport Focus |
| Chris Clark John Provan (in part) | Transport Scotland |
| Stephen Chamberlain | Welsh Assembly Government |

ORR:

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| Stephanie Tobyn | Consumer Policy Team |
| Marcus Clements | Consumer Policy Team |
| David Kimball | Consumer Policy Team |
| Bryan Little | Consumer Policy Team |
| Scott Hamilton | Consumer Policy Team |
| Anna Saunders | Consumer Policy Team |
| Chris Casanovas | Information & Analysis Team |
| Chloe Barton | Legal Team |
| Anne Heal | ORR Non-Executive Director |

Apologies:

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| Stephen Brookes MBE | Rail Sector Champion |
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1. Welcome & Introductions

Stephanie Tobyn welcomed the advisory group and noted the apology from Stephen Brookes MBE.

2. Assisted Travel Advisory Group Terms of Reference

The terms of reference were shared with the advisory group in advance of the meeting. Stephanie summarised the document highlighting the need for an open and transparent process and for the advisory group to test ORR's thinking throughout the review process.

The terms of reference were agreed. ORR confirmed they would be published on their website.

3. Background

Disabled People's Protection Policy (DPPP) & Licence Condition;

David Kimball provided the advisory group with the legislative and historical background to the licence condition that requires train operators and Network Rail to produce a DPPP, noting that ORR could not oblige licence holders to undertake any action that entails 'excessive cost' taking into

account all the circumstances including the nature and scale of licensed activities. The advisory group briefly explored the potential for replacing the outdated concept of ‘protecting’ disabled people with more appropriate wording and noted that this would require a change to the licence condition itself, which had not hitherto been considered in scope of the review.

DPPP Guidance;

David provided a brief context for the 2009 Guidance, noting that it was produced by the Department for Transport prior to the introduction of the Equality Act 2010 and the duties and obligations that legislation places on public service providers and the public sector. Here, the advisory group was reminded that compliance with DPPP Guidance does not provide evidence of compliance with the Equality Act. The advisory group noted that the ORR consultation on Improving Assisted Travel had reinforced the need for a review of the DPPP Guidance to bring it up to date with technological, operational and legislative reforms, and to better reflect passengers’ legitimate expectations of the service.

ORR Research & Assisted Travel Consultation;

Scott Hamilton provided the advisory group with a summary of the key themes from each of the three research projects undertaken by ORR prior to the launch of the Assisted Travel consultation in November 2017.

This was followed by a brief discussion, during which the advisory group agreed that the provision of assisted travel across the rail network could be more consistently and reliably provided and the service more widely advertised.

Scott concluded with findings that assistance failures most commonly tend to occur due to communication issues between stations. Research analysis also pointed to the variation between operators in training provision, station staffing and policies as key drivers of unreliability of service provision.

4. Exploration of the Key Issues

ORR discussed the key issues, identified through their Assisted Travel consultation, with the advisory group and shared their plans for developing proposals for improvements that would form the basis of further consultation on draft guidance in the Autumn. The advisory group was asked to provide advice and comments on these plans.

Reliability

Scott set out how the ORR’s plan to generate proposals for improving reliability with industry experts and obtain the views of disabled passengers on these proposals, focussing on staff communication to ensure passengers receive the assistance they have requested at every stage of their journey. A number of key issues were discussed, including:

- the prominence of Network Rail in providing assistance to passengers;;
- how to reconcile the policy differences between operators;
- the forthcoming replacement of the current passenger assist system, and the benefits that should provide to passengers by giving staff a tool that keeps track of assists in the system and facilitates easy and reliable ‘handovers’ from staff member to member and station to station;
- the need for a journey planner tailored to the needs of people that require assistance, which would depend on better sharing of information between transport service providers; and

- the importance of staff training in delivering a reliable and consistent service across the network.

Scott concluded by noting that he would return to the advisory group for a fuller discussion at the next meeting.

Monitoring

Scott gave an overview of the plan to consider where extra monitoring may be required, to ensure the proposals that are agreed deliver real and lasting improvements to passengers' experience of assisted travel.

The advisory group was interested to understand how monitoring might be increased within the existing ORR budget. Scott advised that data already held by licence holders and by DfT could be used for monitoring purposes. Further research was another option under consideration.

Staff Training

David gave an overview of the plan to strengthen the training requirements of licence holders, building upon the feedback provided in consultation responses and a thorough exploration of existing training provision and good practice.

In the discussion that followed, a number of key points were made:

- Disability and equality awareness needs to permeate throughout licence holders' organisations so that every member of staff understands how the work they do impacts on disabled people; the training of senior managers was key in delivering a culture change in attitude towards the provision of assisted travel;
- Best practice should be shared nationally;
- Disability and equality awareness should be intrinsic to good customer service training; and
- Disability groups and disabled passengers should be involved in the development and delivery of training programmes.

David thanked the advisory group for this initial advice and indicated he would return to them with more detailed proposals.

Passenger Awareness

David set out how the suggestions provided by respondents to the ORR's consultation would be considered for further development and implementation.

During the subsequent discussion it was suggested that promotion of assisted travel services needed to reach a wider audience and target those who currently do not travel by train if awareness is to be raised. There was also a discussion on the merits of promoting the scheme directly to passengers booking tickets with a Disabled Person's Railcard.

However, the advisory group was also mindful that careful consideration of this issue was required to ensure that the extra demand for assisted travel that may be generated by awareness raising was also accompanied by additional support from operators so as not to overwhelm the existing service, undermining the improvements the advisory group wanted to see.

David concluded by noting that he would return to the Group for a fuller discussion.

Booked Assistance Notice Period

Anna Saunders provided an overview of the plans to explore with disabled groups and licence holders the potential for a reduction in the 24-hour notice period and the considerations therein.

In the subsequent discussion it was noted that RDG was undertaking work in this area, and that further collaboration between ORR and RDG would be of benefit. Whilst the advisory group welcomed recent action taken by a number of train operators to reduce the notice period and the benefits these provided to passengers, it also noted the impacts on both passengers and station operators of increasingly inconsistent notice periods across train operators. It was also noted that short notice periods may require additional resources.

Anna reinforced that these considerations would be fully explored as part of the ORR's work and that a further discussion with the advisory group was planned.

Passenger redress for assistance failures

Marcus Clements briefly set out the ORR's current thinking, based on the stakeholder engagement to date, and his plans to further develop proposals.

The subsequent discussion focused on how the ORR's proposals might accommodate existing redress and refund schemes operated by individual licence holders, including those committed to in franchise agreements, and the benefit of simplicity and consistency in the offer of redress.

Marcus concluded by reiterating his plan to revert to the advisory group at the next meeting following further engagement with industry.

Assisted Travel and Driver Controlled Operation (DCO)

Stephanie provided an overview of the work the ORR has done with GTR, and the planned approach to revising the DPPP Guidance. In the subsequent discussion, some of the issues raised by DCO and DOO (Driver Only Operation) were discussed:

- The options for providing assistance if staff were present neither at the station nor onboard the train, including the use of accessible taxis for elements of the journey;
- GTR's use of roving staff to deliver assistance at unstaffed, accessible stations, and whether this was applicable in more rural areas; and
- That providing companions with free travel, as per the bus sector, as opposed to discounted travel, may be a welcome step forward in this area.

Stephanie agreed that this was a complex area where the individual needs of the passenger, the specific journey and the operating practices both at the station and on the train needed to be considered. ORR's approach was likely to focus on ensuring operators' policies are based on minimising the risk of assistance failure by improving communication between staff, between staff and passengers and through providing better information to passengers about the various options open to them in completing their journey.

Other issues arising from 2009 DPPP Guidance

David gave a brief introduction to some of the other areas of guidance that might need more minor updates or amendments and set out how these would be discussed with representative groups and licence holders with a view to further consultation in the Autumn.

Some of the areas discussed were; the impact of alternative accessible transport at unstaffed stations and the reliance on taxis as the alternative to train travel during disruption, the scope of luggage assistance, station facilities, on train facilities and priority seating and the provision, scope and format of passenger facing DPPP information.

ORR role in approval and review of DPPP's

Anna gave an overview of consultation responses in this area and set out the plan for working with key stakeholders to deliver a more transparent, efficient and effective DPPP approval and review process.

The advisory group reiterated a desire for disability groups to be involved, particularly with train operators when they submit amendments to their current policies.

A backstop review period of 5 years, especially if a train company had not submitted any revisions in that time, was also suggested.

Anna agreed to take these suggestions into consideration as proposals were worked up.

Overall, the advisory group supported ORR's plans and looked forward to more detailed discussion of the issues at subsequent meetings.

5. Next Steps

Stephanie thanked the advisory group for their input and offered to meet members individually before the next meeting on 3rd July, if that was considered useful to their thinking or understanding on any of the issues raised.

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