Office of Rail Regulation, Network Rail

Independent Reporter (Part A) Mandate AO/010

Review of Passenger Information During Disruption

209830-10-4-5-6

Final | June 2011

Job number   209830-10

ARUP

Executive Summary

Mandate

A new Approved Code of Practice was published by the Association of Train Operating Companies in November 2009 entitled Passenger Information During Disruption (PIDD). The aim of this code of practice is to improve the provision of information to passengers when there is disruption to the train services.

Now that the code of practice has been in place for over a year, Arup were commissioned by the Office of Rail Regulation under its role as Part A Reporter to investigate how well it has been adopted by the industry. There have been three parts to this study (the first two of which were added in response to the issues associated with the severe weather towards the end of 2010):

- A review of the provision of information during the snow in December 2010 in England, based on interviews with East Coast, First Transpennine Express, Southern and the corresponding Network Rail Routes;

- A similar review with ScotRail and Network Rail Scotland for the rather longer snow period during November and December 2010; and

- A more detailed review of seven individual incidents that took place between January and April 2011 at different locations across the network.

General Observations

It is clear from these reviews that a lot of effort has been required to put PIDD into practice. An extensive training programme has been undertaken nationally which has involved thousands of staff including station staff, conductors, and on site engineers who all play their part in the provision of information. However, the training is not complete. Just over half of the TOCs and Network Rail Routes reviewed had completed the training of staff in Control. The programme of training courses for these staff is coming to an end and so it is vital that each TOC and NR Route train up at least one member of staff to be their internal trainer. Training staff outside Control is less complete and continued effort is required to complete their coverage.

Before PIDD can be put into practice, each TOC has to tailor the code of practice and update their own operational procedures. Less than half of the TOCs reviewed had completed and signed off procedures which are compliant with the PIDD code of practice, although some have informally started to apply some of the PIDD principles whilst awaiting formal approval. One reason for the delay has been a debate about the level of disruption thresholds for triggering CSL2, and whether they should be standardised across all TOCs. This debate was settled last summer with the decision that each TOC could set its own thresholds.

The TOCs have tended to develop their own procedures in isolation. There is therefore a potential gap if one TOC relies on another TOC's staff to provide information to its passengers, for example at stations where it is not the Station Facility Owner. There should therefore be a shared understanding of information flows and requirements. This has been recognised and, as a result of our review

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with them, London Midland held a meeting with Network Rail LNW route and all the other TOCs that use the route to discuss their various PIDD procedures.

Key Conclusions

The application of PIDD has really only started this year and lessons continue to be learnt. From those incidents that we have reviewed, we would highlight the following points:

- Customer Service Level 2 (CSL2), the term applied to enhanced mobilisation that will enable delivery of enhanced passenger information during major delays/disruption, was sometimes declared late and at other times removed too early. It was only correctly logged for three incidents.

- TOCs should prepare contingency timetables that can be quickly uploaded into the national timetable planning system (ITPS). The absence of these caused significant problems during the winter weather. Whilst they will not cover all possible eventualities, particularly on complex rail networks, they should at least provide a reasonable base from which to tailor timetables to specific circumstances. These timetables should reduce the risk of errors made when trying to upload new timetables manually for next day operation. In addition, Network Rail are investigating how to improve the stability and speed of the process. These timetables are a key basis for the provision of information during disruption, such as via Customer Information Systems (CIS).

- Updating CIS at stations can be problematic. Some major stations have their own stand-alone systems that require updating manually and are at the edge of the information flow. Streamlining this flow should be considered for all such stations. There were also instances where staff could not keep up with changes they had to make to train schedules in CIS (especially during the bad weather), although this process should be automated with a planned update to the Darwin system.

- One recent improvement to a CIS system has been the development of a Disruption Mode. This can be used when the train service is heavily disrupted and will only show those trains that are running as opposed to cancellations and delays. This provides clearer information and has received positive feedback from passengers and staff. Other TOCs should consider adopting similar features in their CIS systems.

- There were no instances of a fully developed 'prioritised plan' to manage the incident and recover the train service in a structured way. Because of their nature, some of the incidents were difficult to diagnose initially (or even after some time), in which case a plan should have been produced with an investigative phase. Focus should be placed on this area for improvement as it affects the robustness of the information being provided.

- Improving the logging of incidents should help both real time management and post event reviews. This includes logging the CSL2 declaration and removal, the appointment of Lead Operations Controller and Lead Information Controller, the prioritised plans, and key decisions from joint Network Rail / TOC conferences.

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- The content and frequency of 'core messages' needs to be improved. Some messages read like internal operational information rather than advice to passengers. A messaging system such as Tyrell IO that enforces message format and frequency would help and should be introduced by all TOCs.

- There were some problems with the flow of information via Tyrell messages which led to inaccurate and late information being issued to passengers. Some messages failed to reach their intended recipients, in some cases because address lists were out of date but more investigation is required in other cases. Other messages experienced a delay in transmission which should also be investigated.

- There were instances where information displayed on websites (NRE or the TOC's own website) was out of date, inconsistent or wrong. TOCs should regularly check this information is correct. Also, NRE can send TOCs copies of their service disruption messages by e-mail which is another useful prompt to check.

- Driver Only Operated (DOO) routes are a weakness in the provision of information. Most TOCs have not trained drivers in PIDD principles and have not given them specific roles. Ways to improve information to passengers on these trains should be considered.

- The PIDD code of practice could be improved for long periods of disruption. In particular the requirement to issue core messages every 20 minutes should be reviewed so that after a threshold period of time, when the disruption has stabilised, the frequency can be reduced and an indication given that there have been no changes since the last core message was issued.

- Another area of weakness is the provision of information to ticket selling staff. This was a particular problem during the bad weather when some routes were closed but there were instances when some tickets were sold for these routes. There were also similar problems with some online ticket sales.

- Some TOCs are planning to put in place procedures to review the provision of information after an incident. This is to be encouraged. Consideration should also be given to the provision of automatic measures from the various systems, such as the percentage of train cancellations uploaded before their planned departure time.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. Each TOC and NR Route should produce a clear project plan to complete their PIDD procedures and staff training, and to sign off reciprocal arrangements with neighbouring TOCs;

2. NRE should review the lost and delayed Tyrell messages with NRCC;

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3. All TOCs should use simple Red, Yellow, Green service descriptors, and the use of CSL2 to describe enhanced customer service requirements should be compulsory;

4. The ACOP should be amended to deal with long / severe incidents such as prolonged poor weather when the impacts have stabilised;

5. The use of a messaging system such as Tyrell IO that enforces timescales and message format should be introduced by all TOCs;

6. The use of compulsory fields in control logs for recording key PIDD events such as CSL2 times should be implemented;

7. All TOCs should produce contingency timetables which can be uploaded quickly by Network Rail into ITPS in order to improve information on the next day's timetable;

8. Ensure real time monitoring and recording of passenger facing information feeds is covered in the TOC PIDD procedures;

9. Put in place robust review procedures including both TOC internal procedures and ongoing national review of compliance; and

10. Set up a good practice register to share ideas, to be discussed regularly at an appropriate forum.

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