



## Office of Rail and Road Rail investigation report:

Northern: Provision of passenger  
information – May 2018 timetable

Published March 2019

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## Executive Summary

1. This report sets out the findings of ORR's investigation into Northern's provision of passenger information relating to the May 2018 timetable.
2. We wrote to Northern on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2018<sup>1</sup> initiating this investigation following an ORR Inquiry<sup>2</sup> into the timetable disruption in May 2018 that found that information provided by Northern to its passengers was inadequate. The remit of the Inquiry did not require it to formally investigate whether there had been a breach of Northern's passenger licence information obligations in this area.
3. Our investigation has focused on Northern's duty to provide appropriate, accurate and timely information to enable passengers and prospective passengers to plan and make their journeys with a reasonable degree of assurance, including when there is disruption, and to do so to the greatest extent reasonably practicable having regard to all relevant circumstances.
4. We have considered Northern's provision of information in the lead up to the implementation of the May Timetable ('pre-20 May'), and during the period of disruption following the introduction of the 20 May timetable ('post-20 May').
5. In carrying out this investigation we have reviewed the information gathered by the ORR Inquiry. We have undertaken a detailed analysis of the Northern passenger experience pertaining to the timetable change to better understand the nature and impacts of the primary information failures. We have examined data collected in the course of our regulatory monitoring and we have met with Northern to discuss the provision of passenger information. Further evidence has also been gathered from the company via detailed information requests.

### Our findings – pre-20 May

6. We consider that Northern's communications plan and campaign to encourage passengers to 'check their new train times' was successful in raising awareness amongst passengers and was appropriate in its methods and reach. The campaign commenced four weeks prior to the introduction of the new timetable, which is not out of line with standard industry practice. Our research found that 62% of passengers were aware that the timetable was changing.
7. Timetables were made available online to help passengers to plan their journeys. Some of the distributed flyers at specific stations also highlighted the train times and

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<sup>1</sup> [https://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/39358/concerns-with-northern-compliance-with-passenger-information-obligations-2018-10-03.pdf](https://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/39358/concerns-with-northern-compliance-with-passenger-information-obligations-2018-10-03.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/39042/inquiry-into-may-2018-timetable-disruption-september-2018-findings.pdf](http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/39042/inquiry-into-may-2018-timetable-disruption-september-2018-findings.pdf)

where particular pinch points would be found in the new timetable. However, there was a delay in producing printed timetables, which hampered passengers' ability to plan their journey, particularly for those who are not able to access information through online methods.

8. Our research found that the personal impact of the new timetable was not well understood by some passengers and there was confusion about the scale of the change. In this respect, there was the opportunity to convey a more urgent message both on social media and in literature to passengers generally about the new timetable.
9. Northern demonstrated the ability and willingness to act in response to feedback from passengers and via staff about the impact of the new timetable on specific local services. Direct communications with passengers using services in hotspot areas was positive but passengers using these lines were not also informed via Twitter due to the inability to target Twitter messages to the relevant areas. However, messaging which goes to all passengers but is only relevant to some is normally a regular feature of rail communications (e.g. incident or service disruption on specific lines/routes) and would have supplemented more direct communication.
10. Nonetheless, we consider that Northern's communications plan and campaign to bring the timetable change to passengers' attention was broadly successful. The methods used did signal to passengers that a timetable change was happening and the detailed communications relevant on specific routes was helpful. Prospective passengers were made aware of the change, had access to the expected timetable and reasonable efforts were made to keep passengers up to date in the period leading up to 20 May.
11. Based on the balance of information assessed and summarised here, we consider that Northern took reasonably practicable steps to provide appropriate, accurate and timely information to passengers prior to the timetable change on 20 May

## **Our findings – post-20 May**

12. We consider that the exceptional circumstances that followed the introduction of the 20 May timetable meant that providing perfect advance information for all services was, from the outset, an impossible task. There were two weeks from 20 May to 4 June where in many cases Northern passengers suffered from the provision of inadequate information, which affected their travel and journey planning. Passengers also faced disruption as a result of two RMT strike days on 24 and 26 May.
13. Our guidance to support compliance with condition 4 recognises that timetabling services and providing information to passengers are difficult, complex tasks. There is a balance to be struck between service delivery and the ability to provide appropriate, accurate and timely information for passengers during sustained periods

of disruption. The licence condition is not intended to undermine the primary objective of providing best available service for passengers.

14. Against this context we consider that although passenger information was in many cases inadequate in the period between 20 May and 4 June, there is evidence to suggest that Northern took steps to provide appropriate, accurate and timely information to the greatest extent reasonably practicable having regard to the circumstances that it faced. Northern's interim timetable was introduced on 4 June, which stabilised service levels, improved performance, reduced last-minute cancellations and enabled the provision of better information to passengers (although it is widely recognised that on some routes passengers continued to experience significant disruption following this period e.g. on the Lakes Line).

In particular, we found that:

### **Northern's service recovery up to the introduction of the interim timetable on 4 June**

15. In response to the timetable disruption, Northern took a number of operational decisions to try to stabilise the train service. These steps included:
  - Implementation of a Gold Command Structure to provide a strategic response to the disruption including through focused leadership, co-ordination and communication (for both passengers and staff);
  - Use of 'sweeper trains' to manage passenger demand – initially provided on an ad hoc basis but subsequently included in journey planners from the end of the first week of the new timetable; and
  - Identification of services 'at-risk' of cancellation and use of a three-hour cut-off for decision-making regarding such services, at which point services still 'at-risk' were cancelled to provide certainty to passengers and accurate information on Customer Information System (CIS) screens.
16. Northern was able to implement measures aimed at improving the situation that they faced on 20 May. The decision to hold an emergency directors' meeting on 23 May and subsequently plan the interim timetable for 4 June proved fundamental to providing passengers with greater certainty over the services that they were capable of running.
17. Evidence indicates that whilst the quality of information provided to passengers was in many cases inadequate during the period between 20 May and 4 June, Northern did have regard to the fact that running a train service (or rail replacement bus) is only helpful to passengers if they know when and where the service will arrive, where it is going and how long the journey will take.

## Communication and impact of the interim timetable

18. Northern's interim timetable involved removing 6% of services (168 a day) from its 20 May timetable. Northern has said that this 'enabled us to accelerate our driver training, stabilise service levels, improve performance and significantly reduce last-minute-cancellations'.
19. Northern operated a reduced service until 30 July, when 75% of the removed services in its interim timetable were reinstated. The Inquiry found that overall more trains were running after the interim timetable was introduced than were operating before the timetable of 20 May, and the number of minutes Northern's services were delayed recovered to pre-20 May levels from week three onwards.
20. Northern developed a comprehensive communications plan for passengers to support the introduction of the interim timetable. The evidence we have reviewed suggests that this communications plan was appropriate both in terms of its scale and reach. Firstly, it had clear provisions for ensuring the information reached as many different types of passengers as possible by utilising multiple communications channels. Secondly, it was also targeted through key actions to ensure information was especially focused on the routes which would be most affected by the change. In particular, it gave Northern passengers access to accurate information to enable them to make or plan their journeys from the 4 June with a greater degree of certainty than had been the case in the prior two week period.
21. On the balance of evidence assessed, and as summarised in this chapter, whilst the quality of information provided to passengers was in many cases inadequate during the period between 20 May and 4 June, there is evidence to indicate that the provision of information was appropriately considered by Northern and that it subsequently took reasonable steps to provide appropriate, accurate and timely information to its passengers.

## Next steps

22. This investigation report has been published alongside a letter setting out the decision made by the ORR Board on what, if any, regulatory action should be taken following this investigation.
23. In conjunction with this we have written to all train operators and Network Rail asking them to review their crisis management plans in light of the findings of our investigations into the provision of passenger information. We have also asked them to provide ORR with copies of their arrangements and related contingency plans to support passengers that require additional assistance to travel during periods of disruption (both planned and unplanned). We intend to work with the industry to identify and share good practice in this area.

24. We will continue to monitor performance in this key consumer area and will hold operators to account to ensure that they meet their regulatory obligations.

# 1. Background

## Summary

This chapter explains the background and remit for this investigation, the timetable process and passenger information obligations.

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## Introduction

- 1.1. As the independent economic and safety regulator for Britain's railways, ORR plays a critical role in improving services for rail users. Our long-term vision for the mainline railway industry is a partnership of Network Rail, operators, suppliers and funders working together to deliver a safe, high performing, efficient and developing railway. We are also the consumer authority for the rail industry as a whole. Our consumer function enables us to focus on basic rights for rail passengers such as access, information and redress.
- 1.2. There are industry systems for compiling timetables and providing passengers with information. The System Operator (SO) works with Network Rail route teams and train operators to decide the best allocation of capacity and creates a base timetable twice a year (May and December) and co-ordinates short-term changes to it.
- 1.3. Train operators are responsible for making accurate and timely information available to passengers to enable them to plan and make their journeys with a reasonable degree of assurance, including when there is disruption, to the greatest extent reasonably practicable having regard to all relevant circumstances. This requirement is set out in condition 4 of the Passenger Train Licence and the Statement of National Regulatory Provision (SNRP).

## ORR Inquiry into the timetable disruption in May 2018

- 1.4. On 4 June, the Secretary of State for Transport asked ORR to lead an Inquiry into why the railway system as a whole failed to produce and implement a satisfactory operational timetable in May 2018. The scope<sup>3</sup> of the Inquiry required it to gather evidence to draw conclusions and make recommendations as it saw fit. This included the impact on passengers, both in advance of and following the timetable change, especially in the areas served by Northern and GTR.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/39035/may-2018-timetable-inquiry-annex-b-terms-of-reference.pdf](http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0020/39035/may-2018-timetable-inquiry-annex-b-terms-of-reference.pdf)

- 1.5. The Inquiry focused on what actually took place when the timetable was introduced, compared to what should have happened. For Northern the Inquiry<sup>4</sup> found that information provided to passengers was inadequate which meant that passengers were unable to plan and make their journeys with any certainty.
- 1.6. The remit of the Inquiry did not require it to consider whether Northern had met its licence requirements and therefore whether there had been, is, or is likely to be, a breach of a licence obligation. A determination of a breach of licence is subject to a different evidential test.

## Enforcement remit

- 1.7. Train operators are licence holders and are legally obliged to comply with the conditions of their licences. We are responsible for investigating potential licence breaches and taking appropriate enforcement action when a licence breach is identified. Licence enforcement is governed by a separate legal framework with clear procedures that are set out in our economic enforcement policy and penalties statement<sup>5</sup>. Further details of our legal framework and policy are set out in Annex D.
- 1.8. This investigation has focused on the following key licence provision in the context of the May 2018 timetable change, it has not considered the root causes of the timetable problems as these have been covered in detail by the Inquiry.

## Condition 4 of the train operators' licence SNRP

- 1.9. Condition 4 of the Passenger Train Licence and the Statement of National Regulatory Provision (SNRP)<sup>6</sup>, obliges train operators to secure the provision of appropriate, accurate and timely information to enable railway passengers and prospective passengers to plan and make their journeys with a reasonable degree of assurance, including when there is disruption.
- 1.10. Train operators are also obliged by condition 4 to cooperate as necessary with Network Rail and each other to enable Network Rail to undertake appropriate planning, including when there is disruption.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/39042/inquiry-into-may-2018-timetable-disruption-september-2018-findings.pdf](http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/39042/inquiry-into-may-2018-timetable-disruption-september-2018-findings.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/4716/economic-enforcement-statement.pdf](http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/4716/economic-enforcement-statement.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/2233/lic-pass\\_SNRP.pdf](http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/2233/lic-pass_SNRP.pdf)

- 1.11. Train operators are under a duty to achieve the obligations in condition 4 to the greatest extent reasonably practicable having regard to all relevant circumstances, including the funding available.
- 1.12. To assist licensees we published guidance<sup>7</sup> to support the passenger information licence condition (condition 4) in passenger, station and network operator licences by giving more information about what is expected and how it will be enforced. Our guidance recognises that timetabling services and providing good information is a complex task. Paragraph 25 of the guidance states:

*...‘The licence obligations are not intended to undermine the primary objective of providing the best available service for passengers. Making justified changes to the train plan to meet passengers’ needs should not be conditional on providing perfect advance information about these. However, we would expect licence holders to use reasonable endeavours to get such information out as widely as possible and as quickly as possible. We will take circumstances into account during any assessment of compliance’*

- 1.13. The licence requires a train operator to publish a code of practice which sets out how it will provide information to passengers, including during disruption. Most GB operators use the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC<sup>8</sup>) code of practice<sup>9</sup> (the Code). The code requires the licensee to publish a “local plan” which sets out how the company will deliver its requirements, and makes provision for an annual review of the local plan. We report on activity in our annual consumer report Measuring Up<sup>10</sup>. Northern’s local plan is published on its website<sup>11</sup> and was last updated in April 2018.

## Regulatory context

- 1.14. The Network Code is a set of contractual rules incorporated into each track access agreement between Network Rail and all train operators. It covers those areas where all parties are obliged to work together to the same standards and timescales. The national timetable process is set out in the Network Code Part D.
- 1.15. In February 2018 the industry moved away from standard ‘informed traveller’ timescales, where amended timetables are made available to passengers at 12 weeks in advance (often referred to as T-12). The Network Rail System Operator, reduced the

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<sup>7</sup> [http://orr.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0015/4353/information-for-passengers-guidance-on-meeting-the-licence-condition.pdf](http://orr.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/4353/information-for-passengers-guidance-on-meeting-the-licence-condition.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Now known as the Rail Delivery Group

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.raildeliverygroup.com/about-us/publications.html?task=file.download&id=469771025>

<sup>10</sup> <http://orr.gov.uk/rail/consumers/annual-rail-consumer-report>

<sup>11</sup> <https://d2cf7kiw5xizhy.cloudfront.net/images/policy/2018-04/Local-Delivery-Plan-2018-PDF.pdf>

notice period for changes to train times from 12 weeks to 6 weeks, with certain safeguards for passengers buying advance tickets.

- 1.16. In February 2018, ORR started to escalate monitoring and intervention activity around whether train operators and Network Rail were meeting their ‘informed traveller’ obligations. Subsequently ORR’s formal licence investigation into the root causes of the timetabling problems concluded that Network Rail had breached its licence in relation to its timetabling obligations<sup>12</sup>.
- 1.17. In relation to train operators and third party retailers, ORR also highlighted shortcomings particularly when these parties were selling advance tickets online. In February 2018 we wrote to Managing Directors at all train operators. The letter<sup>13</sup> set out three key principles that needed to be applied during the period when normal industry timescales were not being met. These principles covered transparency, the sale of advance tickets and information provision when timetables remain unconfirmed:
- train operators should be open about the impact on all passengers of the challenges they face, and take responsibility for ensuring that their passengers can get the information they need to plan and make their journey as that information comes available;
  - clear information on the availability of advance tickets, what is available and when, is necessary to help passengers plan journeys even when the timetable is uncertain; and
  - timetable information should be correct as far ahead as possible, and where timetables are not confirmed information about their current status should be accurate and updated frequently.
- 1.18. Work continues<sup>14</sup> in this area as we monitor NR’s delivery of its T-12 recovery plan and work with train operators to ensure that the information provided on websites and mobile apps is as informative as possible. The Network Rail recovery plan for restoring T-12 timescales has now been extended to June 2019.

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<sup>12</sup> [http://orr.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/28425/2018-07-27-breach-of-timetabling-conditions-in-network-rails-network-licence.pdf](http://orr.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/28425/2018-07-27-breach-of-timetabling-conditions-in-network-rails-network-licence.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> [http://orr.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/27047/licence-condition-4-letter-to-toc-managing-directors-2018-02-23.pdf](http://orr.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/27047/licence-condition-4-letter-to-toc-managing-directors-2018-02-23.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> See ORR website for more information on the three strands of Informed Traveller work - <http://orr.gov.uk/rail/consumers/rail-timetable-issues>

## Conduct of the investigation

- 1.19. The purpose of our investigation was to establish if Northern did, or is doing, everything reasonably practicable to achieve compliance with its obligations set out in licence condition 4, as set out above.
- 1.20. In particular, our investigation has focused on Northern's provision of appropriate, accurate and timely information:
- to passengers and prospective passengers prior to the implementation of 20 May 2018 timetable; and
  - to passengers during the subsequent disruption i.e. following the implementation of the 20 May 2018 timetable.
- 1.21. We have also considered the steps Northern has taken or is taking to:
- address the issues, make improvements and recover;
  - whether there are any systemic issues; and/or
  - whether there are any mitigating factors which should be considered in this case
- 1.22. In carrying out its investigation, ORR has drawn on source information provided as part of the ORR Inquiry into the May 2018 disruption<sup>15</sup>. This has provided a substantial evidence base and a considerable volume of information from a range of sources. This has been particularly useful in setting out the experiences and impact of the timetable change on passengers. We have also considered data that we routinely collect in our regulatory monitoring role for example information from complaints, and analysis of posts made by passengers on Twitter.
- 1.23. We met separately with Northern to discuss the provision of passenger information and followed this up with a detailed Information Request requiring specific evidence to provide insight into:
- the extent to which information that was available to Northern was shared with passengers to enable them to better plan and make their journeys;
  - the extent to which feedback from passengers and staff focused on information provision, the scale of such feedback and how such feedback was acted upon; and
  - the extent to which the provision of appropriate, accurate and timely information for passengers was central to the service recovery process.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://orr.gov.uk/rail/consumers/inquiry-into-may-2018-network-disruption>

## Structure of this document

1.24. The document is structured as follows:

- in Chapter 2 we describe Northern's performance before and during the 20 May 2018 timetable change, and the experience of passengers who were affected by it;
- in Chapter 3 we set out the events prior to the 20 May 2018 timetable change and the provision of information to passengers by Northern about their services during this period; and
- in Chapter 4 we set out the events following the introduction of the 20 May timetable and the provision of information to passengers by Northern about their services during the subsequent disruption.

## 2. Passenger experience and impact

### Summary

This chapter analyses Northern's service performance before and after the 20 May 2018 timetable change, and examines the experience of passengers who were affected.

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### Introduction

- 2.1 The ORR Inquiry<sup>16</sup> found that information provided to passengers was inadequate which meant that passengers were unable to plan and make their journeys with reasonable certainty.
- 2.2 We have undertaken a detailed analysis of the Northern passenger experience pertaining to the timetable change to better understand the nature and impacts of the primary information failures they were exposed to. From there, this allows us to assess in Chapters 3 and 4 the extent to which these failures were a consequence of Northern actions and decision-making in relation to condition 4 of its Passenger Licence and SNRP.

### Performance data

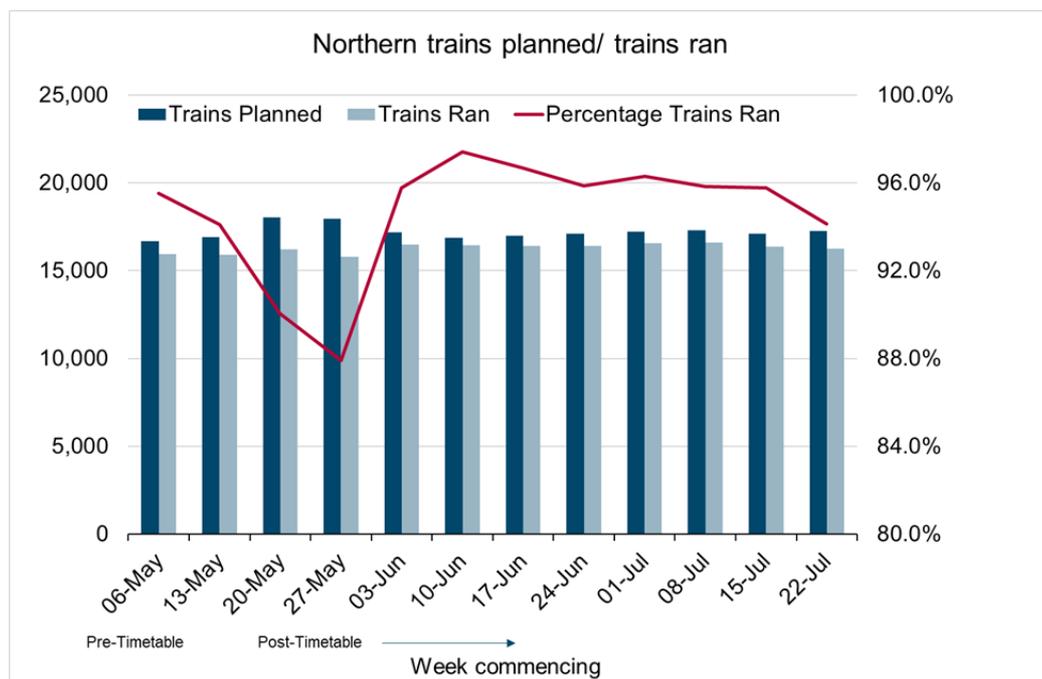
- 2.3 This section is intended to present some context regarding the service levels passengers were experiencing in the time period around the disruption. As the data indicates, the passenger experience effectively distils into three key phases. It covers the time period immediately before the 20 May timetable change, the two week period after Northern attempted to implement the new timetable, and then the time period from 4 June onwards where it introduced a new interim timetable.
- 2.4 The following chart shows the number of trains that Northern planned to run and the number that actually operated. Data is aggregated on a weekly basis. Figure 2.1 shows the increase in the number of services planned to run from 20 May 2018 with the new timetable. Northern operates approximately 2,800 trains a day therefore considering the percentage of trains operated illustrates the scale of the cancellations that occurred.
- 2.5 Although the planned number of services from 20 May was higher than the pre-20 May number in the first two weeks after the timetable change, the actual number of trains which ran was similar to the pre-20 May number. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 clearly illustrate the reduction in planned services following the introduction of the interim timetable on the 4 June where the number of trains planned to run was reduced by around 168

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<sup>16</sup> [http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/39042/inquiry-into-may-2018-timetable-disruption-september-2018-findings.pdf](http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/39042/inquiry-into-may-2018-timetable-disruption-september-2018-findings.pdf)

services per day, but that the percentage of service which ran increased significantly. The positive impact of the interim timetable on service reliability is therefore evident.

**Figure 2.1 – Northern trains planned to run vs. trains which ran**



**Figure 2.2 – Data for Northern trains planned to run vs. trains which ran**

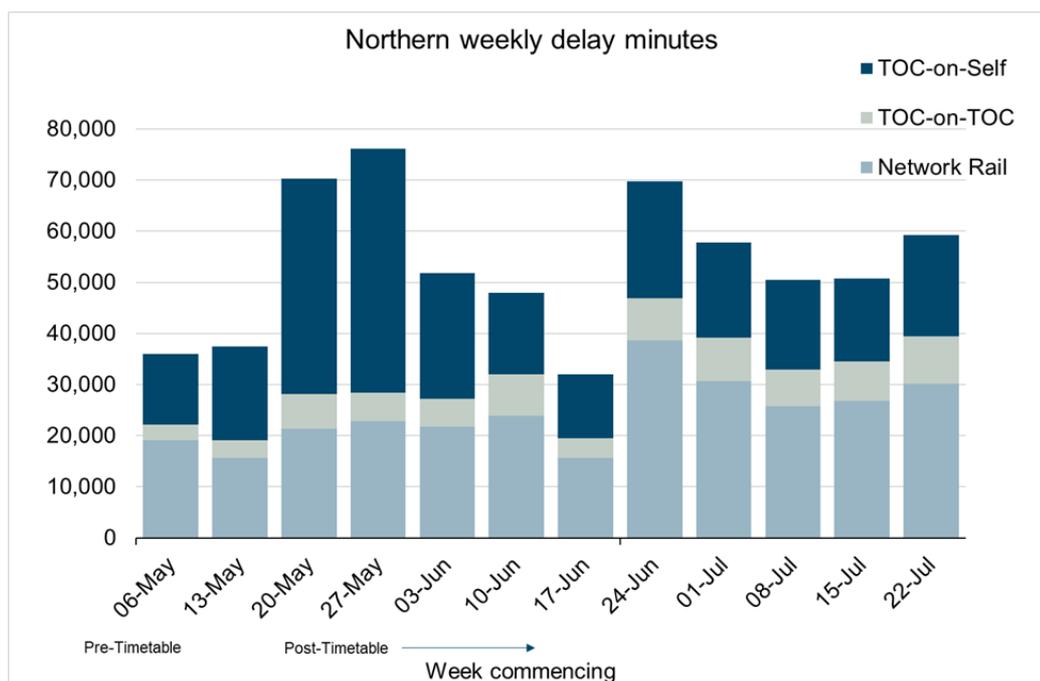
	Pre-timetable		20 May timetable		4 June interim timetable							
Northern	06-May	13-May	20-May	27-May	03-Jun	10-Jun	17-Jun	24-Jun	01-Jul	08-Jul	15-Jul	22-Jul
Trains Planned	16,672	16,920	18,025	17,962	17,194	16,869	16,986	17,094	17,220	17,302	17,097	17,269
Trains Ran	15,925	15,922	16,228	15,790	16,469	16,434	16,421	16,389	16,581	16,584	16,374	16,255
Percentage Trains Ran	95.5%	94.1%	90.0%	87.9%	95.8%	97.4%	96.7%	95.9%	96.3%	95.9%	95.8%	94.1%

2.6 The cause of delay minutes<sup>17</sup> is shown in figure 2.3 and reveals a sudden increase in delays resulting from actions taken by Northern in the first two weeks after the 20 May timetable change. It is then evident how these ‘TOC-on-self’<sup>18</sup> delays began to normalise following the introduction of the interim timetable on 4 June.

<sup>17</sup> Delay minutes are a performance measure for punctuality of passenger and freight trains. A delay is defined as a loss of time against a schedule between two consecutive locations on the train’s journeys.

<sup>18</sup> Delay incidents producing three or more minutes of delay on Britain’s railways are attributed to either Network Rail or a train operator.

**Figure 2.3 - Northern weekly delay minutes**



## Experience of passengers

2.7 As part of the original timetable Inquiry we conducted two pieces of research with passengers to understand their experiences of the 20 May timetable change. Due to the fact the Inquiry research took place in June and July 2018 during the worst periods of disruption it meant that respondent (passenger) recall was optimised, thereby ensuring the accuracy of their answers. We re-examined the Inquiry research to produce a more detailed analysis of the specific responses of Northern passengers from that time period to provide us with a clearer and more focused understanding of their experiences. Our analysis is set out below.

2.8 The first research piece involved the commissioning of a specialist research agency, GfK<sup>19</sup>, to undertake quantitative and qualitative research into the experiences of both passengers and staff who were directly affected by the events surrounding the 20 May timetable change<sup>20</sup>. The research methodology included:

- quantitative surveys with 126 Northern passengers;
- two qualitative focus groups (comprised of 6-8 participants) with Northern passengers; and
- two qualitative tele-depth interviews with Northern rail staff.

<sup>19</sup> GfK has since been taken over by Ipsos MORI.

<sup>20</sup> The final research report produced by GfK can be viewed here: [http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/39037/may-2018-timetable-inquiry-annex-d-orr-customer-research.pdf](http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/39037/may-2018-timetable-inquiry-annex-d-orr-customer-research.pdf)

- 2.9 Respondents included Northern passengers who were a mix of commuters, leisure/business travellers and people with disabilities across a range of routes on the Northern network. The aim was to ensure a good representation of the overall Northern passenger experience before and after the 20 May timetable change.
- 2.10 We also conducted additional research with GB rail passengers affected by the 20 May timetable change via an online survey. This produced 149 responses from Northern passengers.
- 2.11 However, the quantitative research strands did not achieve a sufficiently large number of responses from Northern passengers who had experienced disruption concerning the time period we were investigating. This meant we were only able to generate a limited number of robust quantitative metrics about passenger experiences or perceptions of Northern's journey information provision. To compensate for this we conducted a more detailed review of passengers' experiences using insight from the qualitative phases of the research coupled with an in-depth review of their feedback from social media.

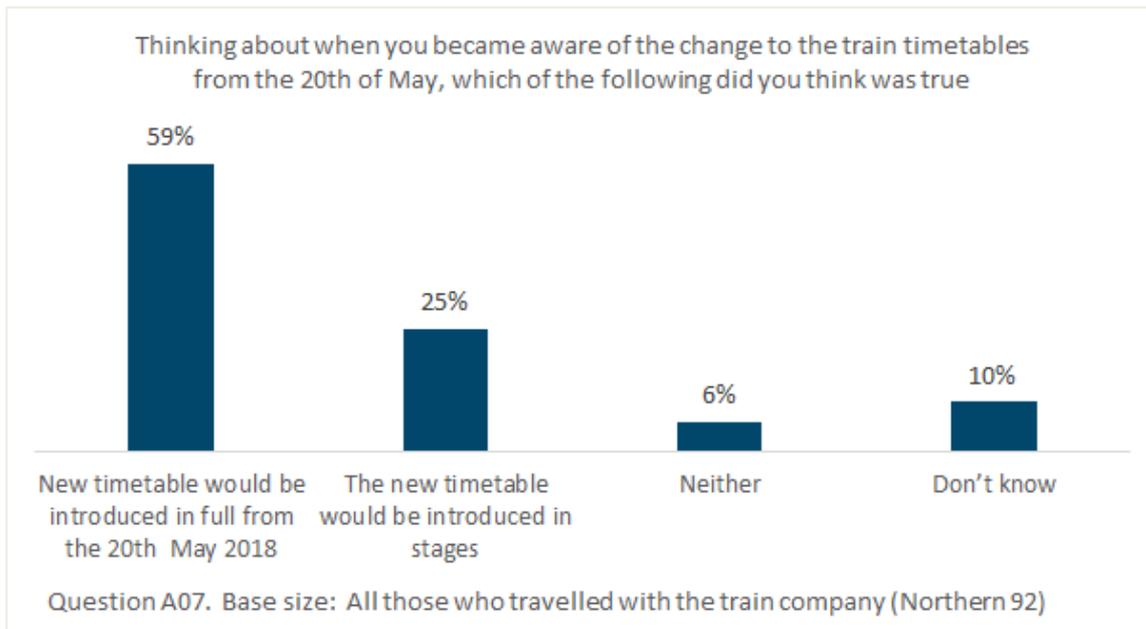
## **Northern passengers' awareness of the timetable change**

- 2.12 Pre-20 May, Northern was fairly effective in communicating to their passengers about the introduction of a new timetable on 20 May, with almost two-thirds (62%)<sup>21</sup> of passengers being aware of a change. This is compared to industry-wide passenger awareness of the timetable change which was around half (51%).
- 2.13 Of those Northern passengers aware of the upcoming timetable change, almost three-fifths (59%) believed the full timetable would be introduced from 20 May – which was correct. However, around a quarter (25%) wrongly believed that Northern would be introducing their new timetable in stages.

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<sup>21</sup> See slide 12 of GfK research report in link above

**Figure 2.4 –Understanding of the timetable change<sup>22</sup>**



## Northern passengers’ experiences and perceptions of information provision following the timetable change from 20 May

2.14 To provide additional context we also examined some of the qualitative feedback we received from Northern passengers to give us a more detailed understanding of how information issues had impacted them. Below is a small sample of the common issues reported.

“The electronic boards at the station are frequently wrong or do not advise of delays or cancellation in good time. Station staff have seemed just as confused as the commuters. I have been put on the incorrect train by a member of Northern staff..”  
- Northern passenger

“Very confusing communications. Delayed leaving Victoria and confusion over right Train in the first place and confusing announcements. Then told the train was terminating two stops later at Salford Crescent. Everyone got off and we were then told to get back on - total chaos.”  
- Northern passenger

“[Information is] very limited and contradictory. Trains shown as on time until just before due, when switched to ‘delayed’, allowing no time to try alternatives. On at least one occasion I ended up boarding a train going in the opposite direction as no announcements or signs.”  
- Northern passenger

“Nobody could tell me why my train was cancelled or when it would run. The service in question was part of the new timetable but for the first week simply didn't exist, it wasn't even showing as cancelled, just not on boards, apps or website. When I presented a printed copy of the May timetable to a member of station staff their answer was that it was probably a typo.” – Northern passenger

<sup>22</sup> Caution, note base size was under 100 (92 respondents)

"Too little, too late. It's no good telling me the 1709 has been cancelled at 1705, or telling me it'll be one minute late, then two, then three, etc."  
.- **Northern passenger**

"Incorrect information, information is not reliable (e.g. delay becomes a cancellation and then the service is reinstated) and information is communicated too late. I have gone to get a coffee due to the train being shown as 20+ mins late and then it arrives on time. Other times I leave work and make the 6 min walk to the station to find the train is significantly delayed but the info is not made available until a few minutes before the train is due to arrive. Trains being cancelled mid journey are the worst as announcements are difficult to hear on the train yet station staff are giving clear directions once people are asked to disembark"  
- **Northern passenger**

"[Announcement] explained what was about to happen. However the announcement should have been made prior to the train departing the station to enable passengers to decide whether to travel." - **Northern passenger**

2.15 We also examined the feedback Northern received from its passengers via social media to further understand the types of issues they were experiencing. This analysis revealed passenger frustration with similar issues to those identified in our research. However, it was noticeable that the volume of contacts about information reduced following the introduction of the interim timetable from the 4 June.

**Figure 2.5 - Examples of passenger information issues reported via Twitter 20 May – 4 June**

**Tweet 1:** @northernassist Apparently this train is on time. I've just pulled up at Lostock and it's cancelled??? Today of all days, when people need to get to Manchester I hope for your sake you can deliver a service!!@northernfailz

06:01	Preston (Lancs)	On time	Platform 1
06:07	Leyland	On time	Platform 2
06:13	Buckshaw Parkway	On time	Platform 1
06:18	Chorley	On time	Platform 2
06:23	Adlington (Lancashire)	On time	Platform 1
06:27	Blackrod	On time	Platform 2
06:31	Horwich Parkway	On time	Platform 1

**Tweet 2:** @northernassist 04:34 from Manchester airport cancelled, but no announcement/explanation. A lot of angry customers on the platform, some with children. #joke

**Tweet 3:** People were stuck on the platform unable to board, it also ended up 20-30 mins late and had a number of confusing announcements on board.

**Tweet 4:** .@northernassist Your trains are a joke. All cancelled from Piccadilly to Bolton until 11pm and part cancelled at Victoria. Only just in one getting home. No information, staff stressed, shocking service

**Tweet 5:** Replying to @northernassist Are the trains running to Liverpool via Pemberton at all? None of the train apps are giving any information what so ever!

**Tweet 6:** No response @northernassist - still no train and the staff are saying they cant get any info from you. Its clear you dont care about your customers but you could at least provide information - or do you think its acceptable to lwave ua strands for 2 houa every night?

**Tweet 7:** Oh look. Both MSL trains still "here" at MAN but do I play train roulette with bags and children or hope the 16:47 will find its carriages and leave first? INFORMATION, costs nothing, solves much. @TPExpressTrains @northernassist @jreynoldsMP @AndyBurnhamGM

Latest Travel News		
↑ Earlier		0 min ago
16:47	Hull	Plat 5
	Delayed	
17:00	Huddersfield	Plat 2
	Delayed	
17:17	Leeds	Plat 1
	On time	
17:47	Hull	Plat 2
	On time	
17:59	Huddersfield	Plat 2
	On time	

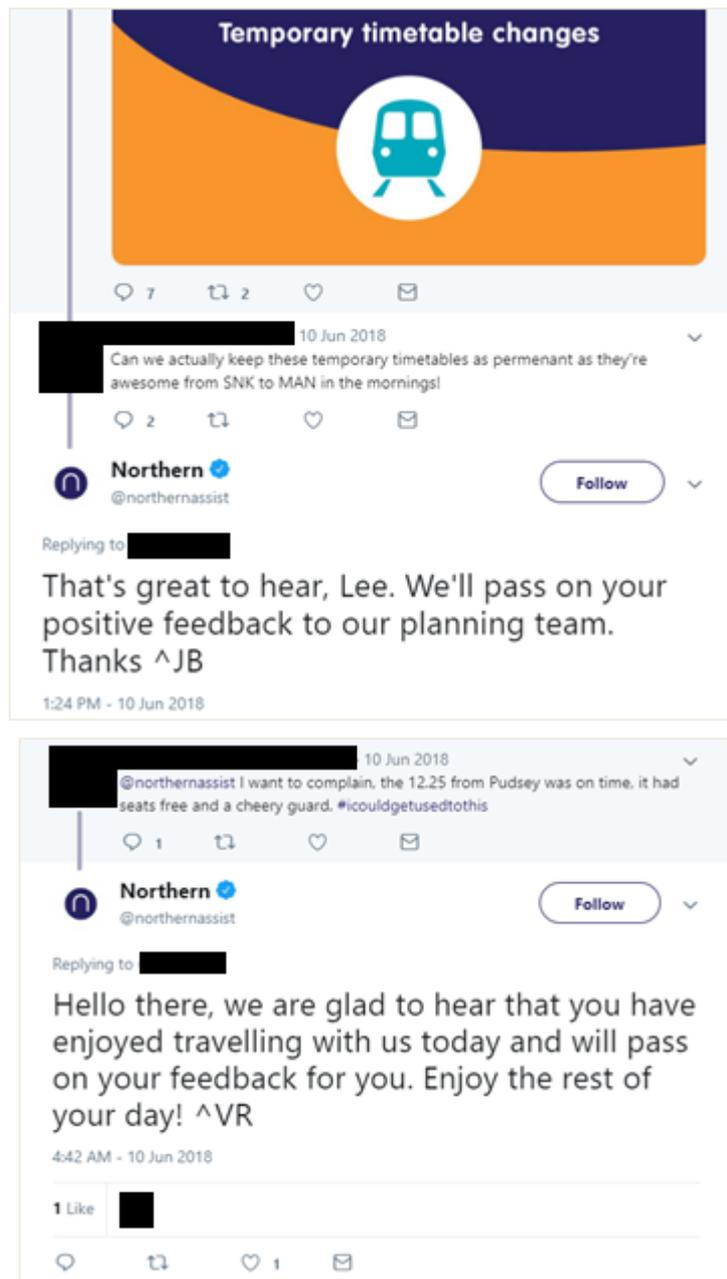
**Tweet 8:** @northernassist any idea what is happening to the 19.21 from Manchester oxford road to Wigan north western? Been stuck on the train for almost 40 minutes with no information now...

## Introduction of interim timetable from 4 June

- 2.16 Analysis of the feedback Northern received from its passengers via social media after the interim timetable was introduced indicates a shift in the nature and sentiment of passenger contacts. Post-4 June, the issues driving dissatisfaction were more noticeably about the number of cancelled and delayed services, use of short-form carriages, reduced frequency of services (as many had been removed from the timetable) and Delay Repay.
- 2.17 This compares to a higher volume of Tweets received in the period 20 May to 3 June concerning inconsistent or inaccurate journey information. This supports the performance data analysis which shows that as the number of on the day cancellations reduced with the introduction of the new interim timetable this resulted in more reliable services and better passenger information. This was reflected in the Inquiry which found that Northern acted quickly to introduce a revised interim timetable on 4 June, with more services operating than before 20 May, and reliability recovered somewhat.
- 2.18 Some examples of the more positive feedback is shown below.

**Figure 2.6 - Examples of more positive passenger feedback via Twitter following introduction of interim timetable post-4 June**





## Understanding the impact of disruption on passengers

2.19 The ORR Inquiry identified a number of impacts on passengers as a consequence of the widespread disruption in May 2018. We have not sought to assess the extent to which those impacts can be directly attributed to failures in the provision of passenger information but it is clear that better information may have alleviated the overall detriment that passengers experienced. The following section draws on the findings of the independent quantitative and qualitative research, and responses from passengers to ORR's own survey and to the Inquiry itself.

## Financial

2.20 The costs to passengers resulting from the timetable disruption have a range of financial impacts on passengers. These might be short-term such as increased childcare costs due to late arrival home or paying for a taxi when the train is cancelled or delayed, buying refreshments at the station whilst waiting for a delayed train, buying dinner because of getting home too late to cook, and paying for public transport to travel to alternative stations. Some financial impacts may be longer-term such as taking a new route to work resulting in an increased travel ticket cost, routinely choosing to take a taxi when travelling home late at night to avoid being 'stuck' at a station late at night, and a loss of earnings.

## Stress and inconvenience

2.21 Being unable to rely on a consistent train service such as late notice cancellations or delays or station skipping can increase the stress experienced by passengers and heighten levels of anxiety as passengers are unable to meet work commitments or family events. There were also many references to parents who were put under extreme stress to make unexpected adjustments to childcare with minimal notice due to the daily uncertainty of their journey times. This can have a detrimental impact on health as increased stress levels manifest themselves.

2.22 We also noted many complaints from passengers regarding overcrowding or being unable to board trains after long gaps between services.

## Employment

2.23 The detrimental impact on passengers' working lives was often in the form of arriving late to work or meetings. Aside from the possible reputational damage to the individual or the employer, including the loss of business, this might be a time cost meaning that the person will be required to stay later at work to complete tasks or to do so because they felt they had to having arrived late.

## Social

2.24 Getting up earlier and getting home later was a consistent issue for passengers, particularly commuters who build their family and social lives around the time of their daily travel. Journeys were being planned on the basis that services will be cancelled or delayed which meant getting earlier trains in the morning and later ones in the evening. Some rail users did not feel comfortable travelling and chose not to do so at all. Such a situation may be exacerbated for those passengers who rely on assistance either booked with the rail company or via friends/family.

2.25 Moreover, the impact of the disruption was in addition to the fact that passengers had already had to make adjustments to account for the changes being made for the planned 20 May timetable. Having made those plans as forewarned by Northern the

impact of the disruption was an additional layer of inconvenience due to the unreliability of the service.

### **Personal safety**

2.26 Passengers were concerned that the unreliability of services – cancellations or delays – particularly late at night leaves them vulnerable and their safety is at increased risk. There was also an impact on passengers with reduced mobility who were physically unable to respond to last minute platform announcements or changes.

### **Trust in the railway (and changing travel behaviour)**

2.27 Passengers' experiences during the disruption caused by the rail timetable changes had a negative impact on their feeling of trust, and relationship with the rail company. The lack of consistency with cancelled trains being changed every day at short notice contributed significantly to that. Likewise, the lack of a clear explanation on why the timetable changes were happening or the scale of the changes, and the lack of improvement in services as a result of the timetable changes had exacerbated the impact. This lack of trust, combined with a change in travel behaviour, may have a financial impact on the rail company.

## **Impact of the disruption on disabled passengers**

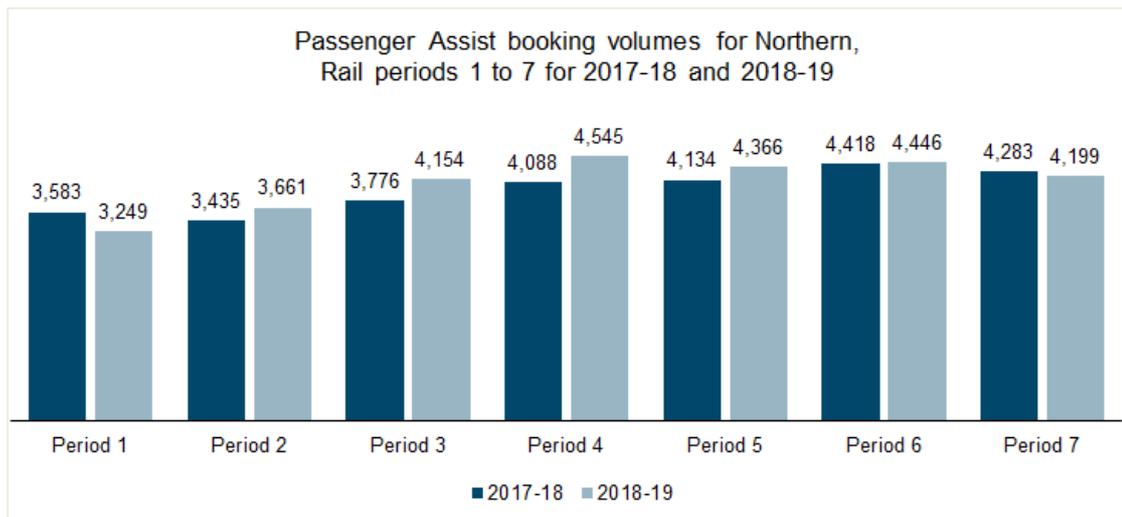
2.28 We undertook analysis of the number of passenger assist bookings, the number of times Alternative Accessible Transport (AAT) was used and the volume of accessibility-related complaints Northern received.

2.29 Figure 2.7 suggests that Passenger Assist booking volumes<sup>23</sup> did not significantly change following the worst of the disruption which commenced during Rail Period 3 (27 May to 23 June). This indicates that for the most part the disruption did not dramatically undermine the willingness to travel of those passengers who rely on booked assistance. Nevertheless, it is likely that some disabled passengers would have chosen not to travel due to concerns about the reliability of services and its potential impact upon assistance provision.

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<sup>23</sup> This refers to bookings that were made in advance of travel. We do not have any data on the number of bookings that were actually fulfilled i.e. assisted journeys successfully undertaken.

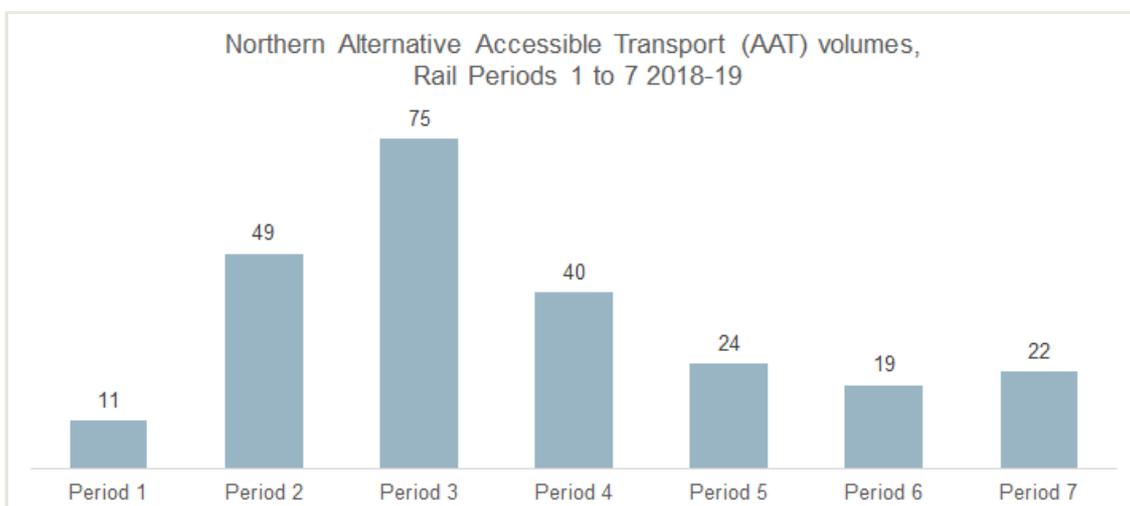
**Figure 2.7 – Comparison of Northern Passenger Assist booking volumes 2017-18 versus 2018-19 for Rail Periods 1-7**



2.30 However, as is outlined in Chapter 4, Northern had a policy of attempting to proactively contact passengers who had booked assistance to alert them in advance about any disruption to their journey. For passengers who required assistance but had not booked in advance, commonly referred to as turn-up-and-go assistance, Northern would alert them to any impact on their journey when they arrived at the station. In both instances Northern informed us that they attempted to mitigate the impact of the disruption by, where appropriate, offering these passengers the option to use AAT, usually a taxi, as an alternative means of transport to enable them to complete their journey.

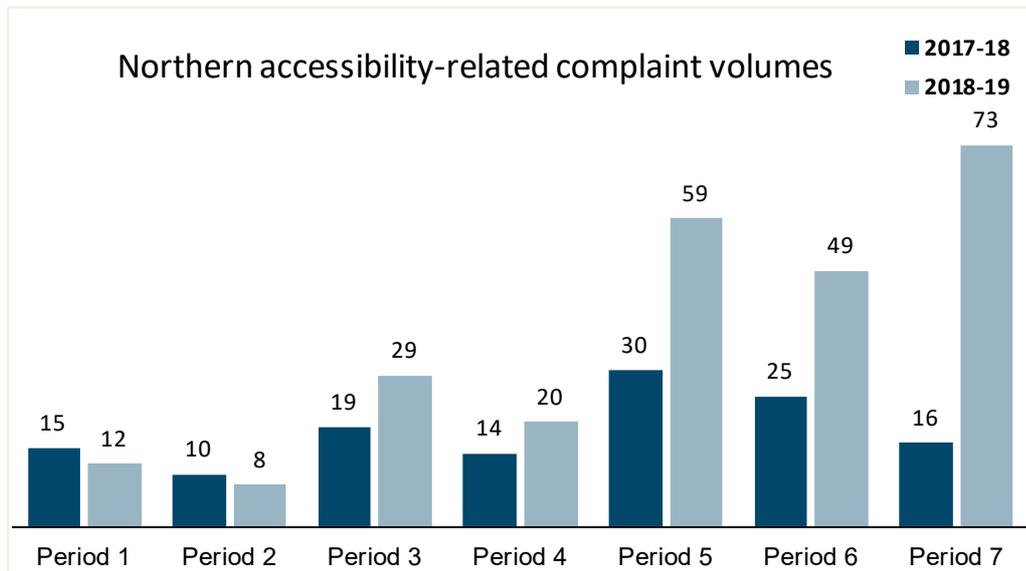
2.31 Figure 2.8 below shows how the volumes of AAT utilised by Northern increased significantly over the worst periods of disruptions at the end of Period 2 and into the start of Period 3 (from 27 May). For these passengers this would mean they would be able to complete their journeys but not as they had originally intended and so could have incurred some additional inconvenience.

**Figure 2.8 – Northern Alternative Accessible Transport volumes 2018-19 (Periods 1-10)**



2.32 Figure 2.9 reveals there was also an increase in accessibility-related complaints during the same period. These increases in accessibility complaint volumes provide some indication that the disruption was having some impact upon the journeys of passengers with disabilities and was therefore a potential causal factor in the increased number of accessibility complaints.

**Figure 2.9 – Comparison of Northern accessibility-related complaint volumes 2017-18 versus 2018-19 for Rail Periods 1-7**

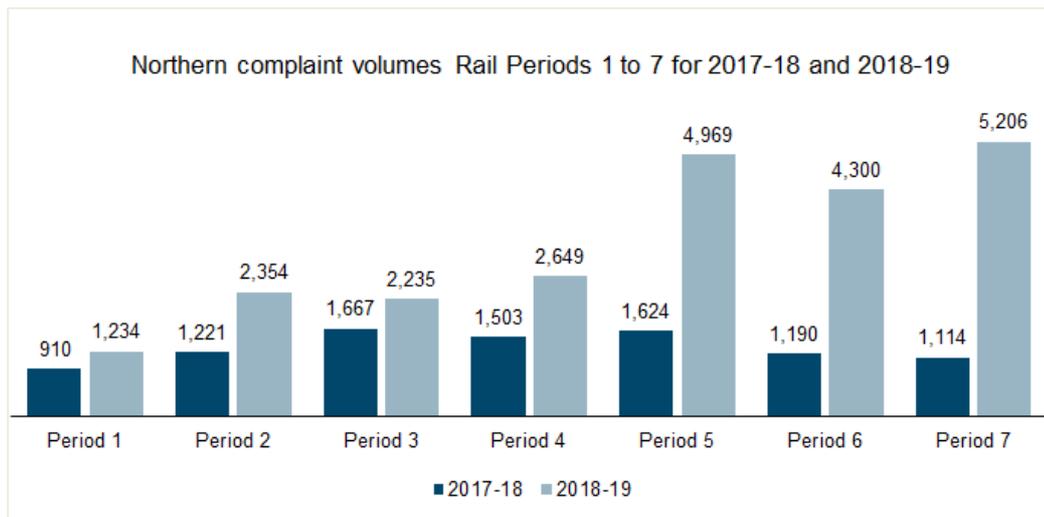


## Complaints and delay compensation

2.33 We also undertook analysis of the number of complaints and Delay Repay claims received by Northern before and after the 20 May timetable change to further understand the impact upon passengers. As the charts below illustrate, there was a significant uplift in both complaint volumes and Delay Repay claims from Rail Period 2 (29 April to 26 May) which corresponds with the worst periods of disruption.

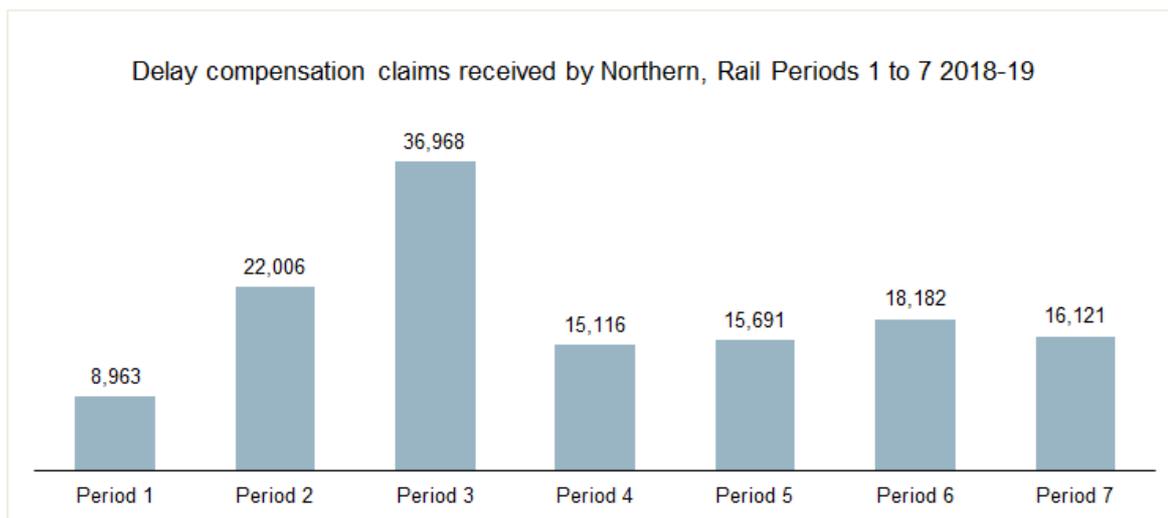
2.34 The difference in complaint volumes relative to the same time period the previous year is also noteworthy. This is because it provides evidence that these increases were not attributable to latent seasonal trends and were instead most likely a consequence of the negative impact of the timetable change on passenger outcomes.

**Figure 2.10 – Comparison of Northern complaint volumes 2017-18 versus 2018-19 for Rail Periods 1-7**



2.35 The chart below illustrates the spike in delay compensation claims received during the introduction of the new timetable towards the end of Rail Period 2 (ending 26 May) and continued into Rail Period 3 (27 May to 23 June). The volumes then begin to stabilise from Rail Period 4 (24 June) onwards following the introduction of the interim timetable.

**Figure 2.11 – Volume of delay compensation claims received by Northern for Rail Periods 1-7 in 2018/19**



## Consideration of passenger impacts

2.36 While not exhaustive the analysis in this chapter has enabled us to develop a greater understanding of the impact of the disruption on Northern passengers in the period before and after the 20 May timetable change. This has informed our analysis in Chapters 3 and 4 to enable us to make judgements about the appropriateness of Northern's actions and operational decision-making in relation to condition 4 of its Passenger Licence and SNRP.

## 3. Information for passengers pre-20 May – analysis of evidence

### Summary

This chapter sets out the events prior to the 20 May 2018 timetable change and the provision of information to passengers by Northern about their services during this period. We set out our analysis of the factors relevant to the investigation for this period alongside our key findings.

### Introduction

3.1. In this chapter we set out our findings in relation to the period leading up to the introduction of the 20 May timetable in respect of condition 4 of the Passenger Train Licence and the Statement of National Regulatory Provision (SNRP). We have analysed a range of information including material received from Northern as part of this investigation and information obtained during the timetable Inquiry. In so doing we have also considered guidance<sup>24</sup> published by ORR, and our expectations for compliance with the licence condition under three broad principles<sup>25</sup> as set out in Chapter 1.

### Information for passengers pre-20 May

#### Timeline of events

3.2. The timeline of relevant key events associated with the provision of information to passengers has been produced from the sources of evidence given to us as part of our investigation work and from the timetable Inquiry. It is provided as a summary below.

Date	ACTIONS
1/2/18	Northern request to rollover the December 2017 timetable beyond May 2018.
16/2/18	Northern's request to rollover the timetable refused by industry.

<sup>24</sup> [http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0015/4353/information-for-passengers-guidance-on-meeting-the-licence-condition.pdf](http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0015/4353/information-for-passengers-guidance-on-meeting-the-licence-condition.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> [http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/27047/licence-condition-4-letter-to-toc-managing-directors-2018-02-23.pdf](http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0020/27047/licence-condition-4-letter-to-toc-managing-directors-2018-02-23.pdf)

Date	ACTIONS
<b>5/3/18</b>	Network Rail provide a revised May 2018 timetable offer to Northern. There remained a number of rejected schedules to finalise, including for passenger services.
<b>21/3/18</b>	Northern consultation with stakeholders and local employers regarding delays to infrastructure enhancements and re-planned timetable.
<b>21/3/18</b>	Briefing to staff on delays to service enhancements.
<b>7/4/18</b>	Northern timetable available on National Rail Enquiries (NRE) from 7 April, and advise that downloadable PDF versions on the Northern website from 7 May, printed versions by 1 June.
<b>Week commencing 22/4/18</b>	Northern's customer campaign 'Have you checked your new train times' commenced.
<b>24/4/18</b>	Special briefing note for staff 'Communicating with our customers' issued to staff includes information about the launch of the customer communications campaign 'Have you checked your new train times'.
<b>25/4/18</b>	Note to staff setting out timetable enhancements per region together with an FAQ on how it affects customers.
<b>Pre-20 May</b>	Additional permanent customer support staff recruited, and a call to arms for volunteers.
<b>7/5/18</b>	Timetables available to download on Northern and NRE websites.
<b>8-10/5/18</b>	"Meet the manager" sessions for staff at 12 locations.
<b>8/5/18</b>	Briefing notes to staff covering each of the regions Northern serve setting out timetable enhancements and changes to services on each line.
<b>9/5/18</b>	Northern wrote to Transport for the North setting out the challenges it had faced in preparing for the May 2018 timetable, and advising that at this stage Northern expected to be in a position to run a full service on the re-planned timetable on 20 May.

Date	ACTIONS
<b>Week commencing 13/5/18</b>	Two email prompts to 300,000 passengers registered on the Northern database to check their train times.
<b>14-17/5/18</b>	Further “meet the manager” sessions at various stations.
<b>17/5/18</b>	Map and table provided to DfT identifying potential hotspots in terms of capacity and service decrements compared to the existing service.
<b>18/5/18</b>	Stakeholder update, press release and special brief to staff issued advising that there will be some localised service disruption as the timetable beds in.

## Analysis

- 3.3. As part of this investigation we requested that Northern provided evidence of their communications pre-20 May 2018 timetable implementation. In conjunction with the information previously received from Northern and other stakeholders as part of the Inquiry, this enabled us to form a good understanding of Northern’s communications activities for passengers and staff in the weeks leading up to the timetable change on 20 May 2018.
- 3.4. Prior to the timetable change, passengers had already experienced a number of issues with Northern’s services for example on the Blackpool line where replacement buses had been running for a number of months. Both Transport Focus and the Mayor for Greater Manchester expressed concerns about the performance of Northern.
- 3.5. On 21 March, Northern consulted with stakeholders and local employers on the re-planning of the May 2018 timetable following the announcement of infrastructure delays. This consultation detailed service enhancements that would be postponed or reduced and those which would still be delivered, and service changes by region. Northern’s Regional Directors also wrote to MPs and other stakeholders on this date to explain that some services planned for May would be delayed until December 2018 due to the delay in the North West Electrification Project.
- 3.6. On 7 April 2018, the re-cast timetable was published on the National Rail Enquires (NRE) website. Northern noted that once the timetables were published local user groups became aware of reductions in services and the impact of changes in train times at local stations. Northern reported that its usual timetable process would involve extensive stakeholder consultation which

would have picked up any local issues so it had to respond to concerns as they were raised.

- 3.7. Northern commenced its campaign to inform passengers that services were changing, '*Have you checked your new train times?*' on 20 April, four weeks before the introduction of the 20 May timetable. This is in step with industry practice and Northern conveyed to us the timeframe was chosen to ensure the campaign did not lose its relevance by starting too early.
- 3.8. An internal timetable communications plan, produced on 23 April covering the period to the end of May 2018, set out Northern's strategy in this area. The plan was designed to maximise the opportunity for customers to see messaging about the timetable change and the need to '*check their train times*' when searching for tickets and times, when moving through the station, and when they got on and off the train. The plan set out the key messages, including the '*what, when and how*' for customers via social media, website, media, on trains, and at stations. Within the plan, Northern also laid out the activity for colleagues and the expectation that they should be '*ambassadors*' for the timetable change. The activity included tools for sharing information with passengers such as leaflets, business cards, and customer announcement scripts.
- 3.9. A large programme of enhancement work is underway in the North West under the '*Great North Rail Project*' banner. The impact of delays to the programme is discussed in the Inquiry report<sup>26</sup>. However, in terms of passenger information we note that Network Rail worked with the affected train operators including Northern to produce passenger information with a distinct branding.



<sup>26</sup> [http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/39042/inquiry-into-may-2018-timetable-disruption-september-2018-findings.pdf](http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/39042/inquiry-into-may-2018-timetable-disruption-september-2018-findings.pdf)

- 3.10. Northern provided examples of its campaign material which included a range of generic and route specific posters and leaflets, flyers, and business cards, as well as messages on social media.
- 3.11. In addition, Northern informed us that posters were placed in train carriages and in stations. A review of a Network Rail led communications group meeting summary note in April 2018 indicates that Northern, as part of this group, would have received promotional posters to install at stations from 13 April 2018.
- 3.12. Several rail user groups shared their views on the quality of information provided by Northern before the 20 May 2018. The mixed nature of the feedback suggests that the experience of passengers varied across the different lines and routes. Those who spoke favourably about the communications confirmed that posters were displayed at stations and on platforms. This included signposting to the website for further information, station announcements were made to inform passengers of changes to the timetable, and that information comprehensively and accurately reflected the planned changes. Some feedback was less positive and stated that posters were not consistently displayed or lacked detail on specific changes, information was late in becoming available or was not made available at all resulting in passengers being unaware of changes to services.
- 3.13. However, relevant station-specific posters were informative and helpful, and displayed morning peak train times and identified services that were anticipated to be busy due to gaps in services.



- 3.14. Northern provided a social media extract demonstrating its daily outbound activity between 19 April and 19 May 2018, which related to the introduction of the new timetable. This extract included a total of 175 Twitter and Facebook messages. These highlighted when services would be changing and when passengers would be able to download timetables.

 Northern  
@northernassist Follow

🕒 Our new timetables are now available on National Rail 🕒

You can check on services here:  
[bit.ly/2B7mWnO](https://bit.ly/2B7mWnO)

Our PDF versions will be available on our website from Monday 7



11:51 AM - 19 Apr 2018

3.15. A more detailed banner message was also displayed on the Northern website.



Latest News **Have you checked your NEW train times?**

Train times are changing - check yours **NOW** at [nationalrail.co.uk](https://nationalrail.co.uk)

Our downloadable pdf versions of timetables will be available from **Monday 7 May** at [northernrailway.co.uk/timetables](https://northernrailway.co.uk/timetables)

You are here: > Home > News > Latest News > Have you checked your NEW train times?

Northern customers are being urged to check their train times and station stops ahead of Britain's biggest train timetable change for decades. We are asking our customers to check before travelling and to plan their journeys before the timetable change on 20 May.

As part of the new timetable, departure times and the Manchester stations where some services travel to and from across the Pennines will change. Our customers are being asked to take note of the changes to the services and think about their onward journey whether on foot, by tram or on the bus.

Train timetables change every May and December to give operators the chance to improve services, change station stops and, where necessary, amend running times.

May 2018 is the biggest change to timetables in decades and, unfortunately, there has been a delay in processing Northern's timetables into industry systems. This delay means that our timetables will not be available to download from this website until Monday 7 May, with printed versions available from 1 June.

Timetables are available to view now at [National Rail Enquiries](#).

3.16. Social media activity accelerated during the three weeks prior to the introduction of the new timetable with approximately seven to eight posts a day. The Twitter message was altered on 2 May, with the availability of PDF

timetables replaced by the message that printed timetables would be available from 1 June.



- 3.17. In addition to the 20 May timetable information referred to in the preceding paragraph, both Facebook and Twitter messages from Northern included messages promoting 'Meet the Manager' sessions at specific times and stations.
- 3.18. Passenger feedback on social media indicates that as at 19 May passengers were able to access the timetable for peak hour services but not the full timetable. It was noted in responses by Northern that there was a delay to the printing and distribution of printed versions of the timetable. This would have impacted on the ability to plan a journey for those who were unable to access timetables online.
- 3.19. Messages about forthcoming strikes<sup>27</sup> on 24 and 26 May were placed on Northern's website from 11 May 2018 and via its Twitter account. Northern advised passengers that strike timetables were usually available to passengers four or five days before industrial action. Feedback on Northern's Twitter account indicates that some passengers found it difficult and frustrating to plan their journeys around the strike days, and timetables on third party websites such as Trainline were still displaying normal service times up until 23 May 2018.
- 3.20. Northern informed ORR that during the week commencing 13 May it sent two email alerts to 300,000 registered Northern customers. It stated that these alerts encouraged passengers to check their train times.
- 3.21. Northern supplied information which demonstrated the role of staff in their timetable communications plan. This included a staff briefing dated 25 April

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<sup>27</sup> 24 and 26 May RMT strike days

which set out the timetable changes by region from 20 May together with '*Frequently Asked Questions*' containing information about the planned communications with passengers. Later briefings in May included specific information about routes detailing what was better/worse/unchanged, and a special brief to staff on 18 May included the information provided to stakeholders about the timetable changes.

- 3.22. Northern supplied copies of staff emails providing feedback on the timetable. Our analysis of emails from 14-17 May shows evidence of Northern acting in response to issues raised by staff and passengers including a request to reinstate a stop and re-time services on the Harrogate line, and re-printing timetables where a number of errors had been identified. Staff also relayed general feedback from passengers on the timetable change as well as specific concerns around capacity on the revised services.
- 3.23. Northern provided details of its development and use of a '*hotspot*' map which predicted areas where there were changes to service frequency or mismatches between demand and capacity where it was too late to do fixes. This was informed by verbal feedback from staff. In a later submission Northern stated that '*the hotspot map identified areas where we anticipated disruption could (but not necessarily would) occur based on a basic capacity versus demand analysis – it could not have been used to anticipate the impact of emergency rostering.*'
- 3.24. The map was not intended as an aid to passengers as to whether their train was running, and Northern remarked that any social media message about hotspot locations would have gone out to all passengers. Northern stated that its approach was to have face-to-face contact with passengers at particular stations. It provided evidence of a '*call to arms*' for volunteers to assist passengers together with the resulting staff plan for w/c 14 May. This plan set out staffing including times of attendance for six locations, as well as '*meet the managers*' events.
- 3.25. Northern supplied a copy of a map and covering email sent to DfT on 17 May which identified areas '*we think could be potential hotspots in terms of capacity and service decrements compared to the existing service*'...and there '*is also a high-risk of poor operational performance due to the short timescales to create the timetable after the late notification of the delivery*'. On 18 May Northern wrote to stakeholders to advise that it expected some localised service disruption, which could happen at very short-notice whilst the timetable bedded in. That day it also issued a press release with the same message. Northern considered that the phrase '*localised service disruption*' was commensurate with what it knew at that time.
- 3.26. Northern explained that it had made provision for the establishment of a gold command structure for the timetable change on 20 May. This included

conference calls three times a day - after morning peak, before evening peak, and after evening peak - to assess how the service had worked, and respond to any issues.

## Findings

- 3.27. We consider that Northern's communications plan and campaign to encourage passengers to 'check their new train times' was successful in raising awareness amongst passengers and was appropriate in its methods and reach. The campaign commenced four weeks prior to the introduction of the new timetable, which is not out of line with standard industry practice. Our research found that 62% of passengers were aware that the timetable was changing.
- 3.28. Timetables were made available online to help passengers to plan their journeys. Some of the distributed flyers at specific stations also highlighted the train times and where particular pinch points would be found in the new timetable. However, there was a delay in producing printed timetables, which hampered passengers' ability to plan their journey, particularly for those who are not able to access information through online methods.
- 3.29. Our research found that the personal impact of the new timetable was not well understood by some passengers and there was confusion about the scale of the change. In this respect, there was the opportunity to convey a more urgent message both on social media and in literature to passengers generally about the new timetable.
- 3.30. Northern demonstrated the ability and willingness to act in response to feedback from passengers and via staff about the impact of the new timetable on specific local services. Direct communications with passengers using services in hotspot areas was positive but passengers using these lines were not also informed via Twitter due to the inability to target Twitter messages to the relevant areas. However, messaging which goes to all passengers but is only relevant to some is normally a regular feature of rail communications (e.g. incident or service disruption on specific lines/routes) and would have supplemented more direct communication.
- 3.31. Nonetheless, we consider that Northern's communications plan and campaign to bring the timetable change to passengers' attention was broadly successful. The methods used did signal to passengers that a timetable change was happening and the detailed communications relevant on specific routes was helpful. Prospective passengers were made aware of the change, had access to the expected timetable and reasonable efforts were made to keep passengers up to date in the period leading up to 20 May.
- 3.32. Based on the balance of information assessed and summarised here, we consider that Northern took reasonably practicable steps to provide appropriate, accurate and timely information to passengers prior to the timetable change on 20 May.

## 4. Information for passengers post-20 May – analysis of evidence

### Summary

This chapter sets out the events following the introduction of the 20 May timetable and the provision of information to passengers by Northern about their services during the subsequent disruption. We set out our analysis of the factors relevant to the investigation for this period alongside our key findings.

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### Introduction

- 4.1. In this chapter we set out our analysis and findings in relation to the period following the introduction of the 20 May timetable in respect of condition 4 of the Passenger Train Licence and the Statement of National Regulatory Provision (SNRP).

### Information for passengers post-20 May

#### Background

- 4.2. Rail disruption can take many forms including a failed train, problems with signalling, track defects, power supply problems and adverse weather. Delays are often categorised as minor or major, and the industry has established plans and thresholds for escalation and response that aim to provide appropriate, accurate and timely information and advice so that passengers can make informed choices about their journey. Such plans are aimed at relatively short term operational delays that can occur on a daily basis. Where more severe disruption occurs - e.g. the extreme weather experienced in February 2018 as a result of the 'Beast from the East' - rail services can be disrupted for several days and the aim of the train operators and Network Rail is to recover operations to normal as soon as possible. However, these longer period events can require a different approach as the techniques for dealing with on the day disruption may no longer be appropriate.
- 4.3. The disruption that occurred because of the timetable change in May 2018 was severe. In looking at the information provided to passengers our primary focus has been on the period of two weeks between 20 May and the introduction of an interim timetable on 4 June. As performance data in Chapter 2 demonstrates, following the introduction of the interim timetable on 4 June the number of planned trains which ran increased by around 8% which then resulted in a corresponding improvements in service reliability and passenger information, allowing passengers to plan ahead with greater certainty. However, this does not lessen the consequential impact of an interim timetable on broader passenger satisfaction.

4.4. In parallel with the disruption caused by the failure of the May 2018 timetable, Northern services experienced additional disruption caused by an ongoing industrial relations dispute. This exacerbated the impact on staff and passengers, and complicated the short-term planning of trains and crews.

## Timeline of events

4.5. The timeline of relevant key events associated with the provision of information to passengers has been produced from the sources of evidence given to us as part of our investigation work and from the timetable Inquiry. It is provided as a summary below.

DATE	ACTIONS
20/5/18	The May 2018 timetable was introduced, with emergency rostering affecting approximately 700 drivers and 2,300 trains each day.
20/5/18	From 20 May to 3 June 2018, Northern staff were deployed to hotspot locations to provide additional customer service assistance to stations.
20/5/18	In the days after the timetable change, attempts were made to announce cancellations three hours before the due time. Twitter updates were deployed every 30 minutes. Manual announcements at Victoria station replaced the normal automated messages. Customer Information System (CIS) screens throughout this period were struggling to keep up with the volume of changes.
21/5/18	On the first weekday (Monday 21 May) of the new timetable almost one in ten (9%) of planned services were cancelled. This compared to 4% the previous Monday (14 May).
22/5/18	Tickets were accepted on Metrolink (trams) and restrictions were lifted on time bound tickets such as advanced purchase.
23/5/18	Northern held an emergency directors' meeting to develop a recovery strategy, leading to the production of the interim timetable.
24/5/18	RMT strike (which required a special timetable to be operated)
26/5/18	RMT strike (which required a special timetable to be operated)
29/5/18	Northern presented the interim timetable to the Secretary of State, before uploading it into relevant online systems.
1/6/18	Northern announced the interim timetable publicly.
2/6/18	Great North Rail project – start of planned closure of Liverpool Lime Street station until 30 July.
4/6/18	Northern's interim timetable was introduced which removed 6% (168 a day) of Northern's services in an attempt to stabilise service levels and reduce late-notice cancellations.

DATE	ACTIONS
8/6/18	From 8 June 2018, tickets were accepted on all other operators' routes and publicised via an RDG press release.
13/6/18	The Rest Day Working Agreement was re-instated.
12/7/18	Northern was asked by the Department for Transport and Rail North Partnership (RNP) to work with Network Rail and TransPennine Express to identify a joint solution to reintroduce services.  An additional compensation scheme was introduced for season ticket holders on specified routes who experienced prolonged disruption.
30/7/18	75% of the removed services in Northern's interim timetable were re-instated.
3/9/18	A further 30 services were reintroduced.
9/10/18	An additional compensation scheme was introduced for non-season ticket holders who travelled three days per week or more on specified routes and experienced prolonged disruption.

## Northern's service recovery up to the introduction of the interim timetable on 4 June

- 4.6. Northern told us that the full impact of the compressed preparations for the timetable change only became apparent when the timetable went live.
- 4.7. On 21 May, Transport Focus described the impact of the new timetable for customers of Northern:

*'Some Northern passengers had a torrid time. Many trains delayed or cancelled in the North West. One in seven of its services were cancelled this morning (21 May), with a further 17 per cent delayed by at least five minutes. There were lots of staff around and good information at places like Bolton but no substitute for sticking to the basic promise of the railways: running the trains on time.'*

- 4.8. The graphic below from the Transport Focus article shows that Northern was continuing with the standard practice of showing cancellation of services on journey planners and Customer Information System (CIS) screens. This provided certainty for passengers about which services were operating and those which were not.

Figure 4.1 – CIS screen of Northern services on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> May

Time	Destination	Platform	Expected
07:39	Wigan North West	4	08:24
08:22	Preston Lancs		Cancelled
08:23	Manchester Pic		Cancelled
08:26	Buckshaw Parkway		Cancelled
08:27	Stalybridge		Cancelled
08:31	Blackburn		Cancelled
08:40	Wigan North West	1	On time
08:40	Manchester Vic	4	08:42
08:49	Rochdale		Cancelled
08:52	Blackpool North and Windermere	1	On time

will commence on Sunday 20th May with significant changes

Time Now 08:25:09

- 4.9. Northern explained the scale and nature of the challenges it was facing in the first week of the timetable change both in operational terms and what this meant for information provision to both staff and passengers:

*“[A]fter the introduction of the timetable on 20 May we were trying to deal with issues as they arose in real time. As a result, the quality of the information we were able to provide to staff and passengers, and the speed with which we were able to provide it, were materially impacted. To put this into context, Northern was cancelling on average 1.7% of planned services before December 2017, but in the period from 20 May 2018 until the introduction of the interim timetable (referred to below) on 4 June 2018, Northern was cancelling 11% of services.”*

- 4.10. In the first week of the timetable change, Northern’s initial response to the disruption could be characterised as reactionary as events unfolded and it worked to urgently develop mitigations. This manifested itself in some key actions and processes conceived in response to the most pressing areas of service failure that had become apparent.

## Gold Command Structure

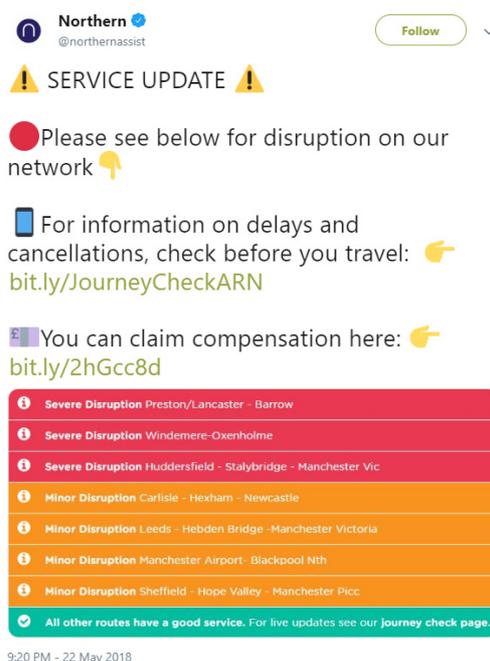
- 4.11. A ‘Gold Command structure’ (the standard industry control structure for response to major incidents) was set up to manage any disruption from the timetable change. Northern advised us that this process had already been agreed prior to the introduction of the new timetable and so was put into practice from week commencing 21 May.
- 4.12. This structure centred on telephone conferences held three times a day with pre-selected staff covering different levels of seniority, key functions and included local managers across the breadth of the network. These calls took place after the morning peak, before the evening peak and after the evening peak. There were also additional

ad hoc calls to supplement this where necessary. It considered any feedback from the previous peak performance and fed this into operational decision-making. This allowed tweaks to be made to the train plan in a managed way, which gave time for information to be updated in the downstream systems. Other issues that were discussed routinely included emergency rostering and risks to the operation of the timetable.

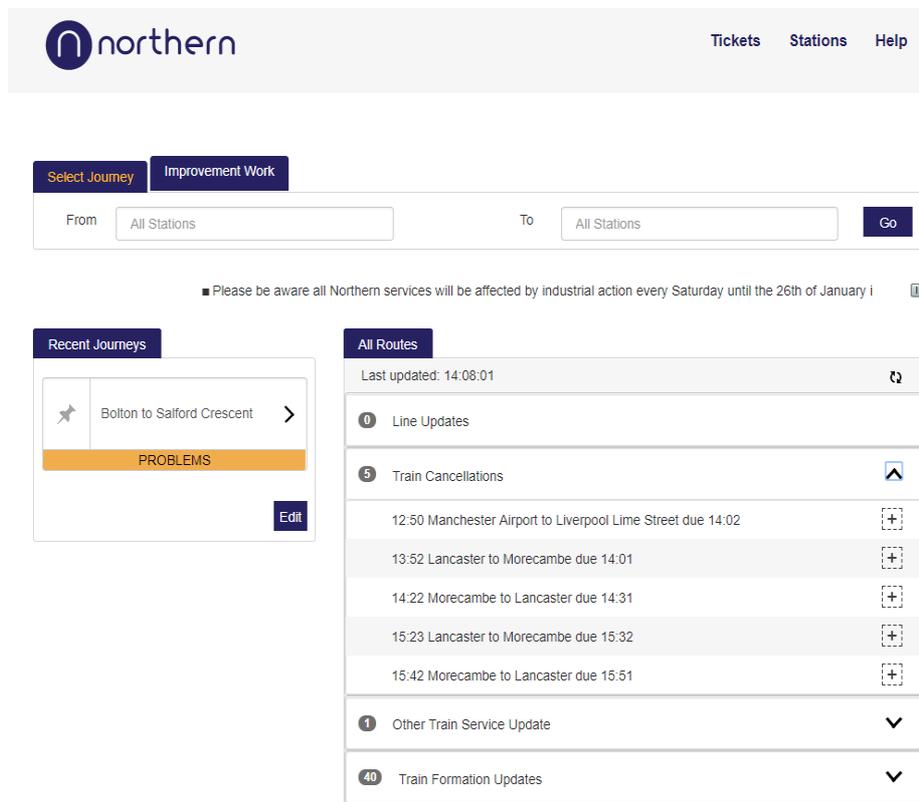
- 4.13. Northern explained that these Gold Command calls were crucial in cascading information down to stations and frontline staff and then receiving feedback on the next call on the effectiveness of any measures previously taken. For example, it provided information on when to use special passenger information messages on Customer Information Systems (CIS) screens, manual announcements in stations or information whiteboards. It also led to the creation of an information hub at Manchester Victoria station which was staffed with customer service advisors. Northern also used its gold command structure to inform its press officers of key passenger information that should be proactively disseminated to regional local newspapers and websites e.g. the Warrington Guardian.
- 4.14. The Gold Command structure was used throughout the main periods of disruption. This included strike days, when major events were taking place and when further timetable changes were made, such as when additional services were added on 30 July.

## Social media

- 4.15. Northern told us that it was concerned about overloading industry systems with the scale of changes that were occurring as a consequence of the disruption. This led it to use social media as one of its primary outlets for the latest service updates by posting service status information every half an hour via Twitter.



- 4.16. The messages included a link to the Northern JourneyCheck page which provides details of all cancelled or altered services and can filter messages by route.



- 4.17. In our correspondence and interviews with Northern’s senior management, they outlined how important social media was in disseminating the latest service updates and travel information to passengers during the worst of the disruption. Northern runs its social media team from its control centre in York and staffs the service between 6am and 10pm. According to its social media policy, it aims to provide a response to all messages within 30 minutes.
- 4.18. As part of this investigation, Northern has provided copies of its standard social media messaging throughout the relevant period. Within the document, Northern highlighted a number of questions that it expected to receive and it provided a sample answer in response to those questions for ease of use by its staff on social media. Our analysis indicates these were not used extensively, with Northern instead opting to tailor its messages to each customer concerned.

### ‘At-risk’ list

- 4.19. One of the methods Northern used to attempt to stabilise the service was the development of an ‘at-risk’ list. Services where resources could not be matched to work requirements were internally designated to be at-risk of cancellation. Due to the dynamic nature of the disruption, Northern told us that at-risk services could only be identified either the day before or on the day of departure. The pace of change during the disruption meant that the list of services that were at-risk was changing on an

hourly basis as Northern staff sought to get the train service covered. As the list of trains was not fixed, Northern was not able to inform passengers in advance of the day of service.

- 4.20. To mitigate against short-notice cancellations, Northern introduced a three-hour cut off for at-risk services when it became apparent that the services could not be covered. This meant that cancelled services could be publicised allowing passengers greater ability to plan around the cancellations.

## **Sweeper trains**

- 4.21. With peak capacity already reduced on the Bolton Corridor by the new timetable, any cancellations or delays resulted in crowds building up on the stations. This was brought to the attention of the Gold Command. In the first few days of the timetable, where crew and rolling stock were available, Northern ran some additional peak time 'sweeper train' shuttles between Buckshaw Parkway and Manchester Victoria. Initially these additional services were ad hoc but when the timetable was reintroduced on 25 May (after a strike day timetable was in use on 24 May) the sweeper trains became part of the advertised timetable.

## **Increase in staff headcount**

- 4.22. Having created a 'hotspot' map, the response to the disruption was to deploy staff to those locations to provide additional customer service and to feedback live issues to the Gold Command structure that had been established. The extra staff updated whiteboards at stations with the latest information. At Manchester Victoria an information pod was established to give information to passengers and also feed live information back to the centre.
- 4.23. In addition to standard industry communication methods, staff were able to feedback via an internal Facebook group. This allowed two-way communication and feedback on changes that were planned.

## **Strike action in immediate period after disruption began**

- 4.24. Passengers also faced disruption as a result of two RMT strike days in the first week of the timetable change on 24 and 26 May. The Inquiry<sup>28</sup> found that Northern appeared to cope well with the additional challenge the strikes presented. Northern provided notification to passengers of RMT strikes on 21 and 23 May (for 24 and 26 May strikes respectively) via website travel alerts and press releases.

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<sup>28</sup> [http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/39042/inquiry-into-may-2018-timetable-disruption-september-2018-findings.pdf](http://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/39042/inquiry-into-may-2018-timetable-disruption-september-2018-findings.pdf)

⚠️ RMT UNION STRIKE ACTION planned for Thursday 24 & Saturday 26 May ⚠️  
Please plan ahead as your journey will be affected.

You can find information on our train services below ↓

For all information please see here:

[bit.ly/2DemWEJ](https://bit.ly/2DemWEJ)



8:00 PM - 24 May 2018

## Communication and impact of the interim timetable

- 4.25. It became clear to Northern's senior management that the disruption it was experiencing was likely to be both prolonged and severe unless an urgent service recovery plan was developed. In response to those events in the first few days of the timetable change, Northern held an emergency directors' meeting on 23 May. During this meeting, a decision was taken to develop an interim timetable for implementation from the 4 June subject to approval. This built on changes that were already planned for the closure of Liverpool Lime Street station as part of the Great North Rail Project.
- 4.26. During this investigation, Northern senior management explained to us the process they undertook over that bank holiday weekend 25-28 May to develop the interim timetable in time to present it to the Secretary of State during a conference call on the morning of Tuesday 29 May. It was also shared with officials at the DfT and Rail North. Northern then received formal approval from DfT on Friday 1 June to introduce the emergency interim timetable from Monday 4 June.
- 4.27. In operational terms, the interim timetable involved removing 6% of services (168 a day) from its 20 May timetable (see figures 2.1 and 2.2 in chapter 2). Northern stated that this '*enabled us to accelerate our driver training, stabilise service levels, improve performance and significantly reduce last-minute-cancellations*'.
- 4.28. We undertook an analysis of internal Northern documents and interview transcripts to understand how quickly and effectively it disseminated information about the interim timetable change to passengers. This was especially important given that passengers had already been coping with an unfamiliar timetable that had proven to be unreliable.
- 4.29. As part of Northern's submission to this investigation we were provided with a document dated Friday 1 June, which showed that the company had acted on the day of the DfT approval of the interim timetable to implement a communications plan for

passenger information about the new timetable. This set out a number key actions including that:

- The new timetable had already been uploaded into industry systems and was accessible to passengers on NRE, Trainline and other prominent apps and websites;
- Advice was sent to key stakeholders on the afternoon of 1 June to inform them about the decision to proceed with an interim timetable;
- A press release was sent to major news outlets, uploaded to the Northern website and promoted on the company's Twitter and Facebook accounts;
- The website included a link to a live interactive map and searchable station finder to help passengers plan journeys from their local station;
- An email was planned to be sent out to all registered customers listed on the company's CRM system;
- Northern had invested in additional 'paid for' advertising to boost its messaging about the interim timetable in the most affected areas;
- Posters were being produced and were planned to be placed in stations and ticket offices on affected lines over that weekend of 2-3 June; and
- Leaflets were being printed for distribution at stations and on trains and this messaging was planned to be supported by digital wall coverage and Customer Information System (CIS) screens in stations.

4.30. The document also shows that Northern had been examining options for placing advertisements in '*key regional titles*' (i.e. local newspapers). On 4 June the interim timetable was introduced and Northern's Managing Director appeared on several radio and television stations to explain the changes being made.

## Lakes Line

4.31. The interim timetable resulted in trains being replaced by buses on the Lakes Line between Oxenholme and Windermere. Northern explained to the Inquiry that the decision to remove Windermere services was taken as part of a bigger package of service reductions across the north-west and allowed release of former TransPennine Express drivers so they could undertake required training on rolling stock<sup>29</sup>. In its Lakes Line report, Transport Focus noted that the replacement bus operation was '*generally efficient and effective, keeping passengers moving, supported by friendly and helpful staff*'. Where stations had information screens then bus departures were shown. At some stations the bus did not depart from immediately outside the station

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<sup>29</sup> Since the Lakes Line was taken over from TPE at the start of the franchise in 2016.

but the bus stop was marked as rail replacement and the route from the station was marked.



- 4.32. Initially, buses were planned to be used for a period of two weeks from 4 June. This was later extended for a further two weeks, it was not until 2 July that Northern was able to reinstate a rail service on this line, albeit to a temporary timetable.

### Automatic announcements

- 4.33. While the stations in the Manchester area have customer information screens, not all of them have automatic announcements. This places reliance on staff being available to individually announce trains. While manual announcements can be more helpful during periods of disruption, it is useful to have the automated system to ensure that the basic messages are communicated. We note that Northern plans to address this issue through an upgrade programme of the customer information system which is underway.

### Great North Rail project



 Northern  @northernassist · 1 Jun 2018  
 The upgrade of 25 mile stretch of track between #Manchester and #Preston done by @TheGNRP will mean buses will replace trains at weekends.

For more details on the improvement work, please check here: [bit.ly/2DtZalq](https://bit.ly/2DtZalq) 



- 4.34. The volume of engineering work in the region, including electrification of the Bolton line and capacity works at Liverpool Lime Street meant that a normal service was not able to operate, especially at weekends.
- 4.35. The planned closure of Liverpool Lime Street for most of June and July 2018 meant that services operating in that area had already been planned to change. Further revisions were added to this timetable to provide a more stable interim timetable which was introduced on Monday 4 June. The interim timetable was in place until the end of the Liverpool Lime Street works.

### **Additional measures for disabled passengers**

- 4.36. Passengers with disabilities were significantly impacted by the poor or changing information during the May 2018 timetable disruption. Any short-notice information changes can impact passengers with disabilities in a particularly difficult way. We discussed the assisted travel booking system with Northern as part of the Inquiry. At that time Northern told us that there were no specific measures put in place for passengers with accessibility requirements, but that its staff had the autonomy to make decisions about alternative transport arrangements. Such autonomy would have enabled staff to assist ‘turn up and go passengers’ in particular.
- 4.37. Northern has since outlined in a written response to this investigation’s information request that it proactively engaged with Passenger Assist users (i.e. those passengers who had booked assistance) during the period of disruption.

*'Northern proactively engaged with Passenger Assist users during the relevant period. We do not have a record of the number of such calls that were made. Staff contacting such passengers did not use scripts but were briefed to focus on three key points: i) advise the passenger of the disruption; ii) ascertain if they were still intending to travel; and iii) advise them as to alternative travel arrangements.*

*The Passenger Assist staff were briefed to advise passengers at the time of booking assistance of the importance of checking the status of their intended service prior to travelling because of the disruption and to contact either the Passenger Assist or Customer Experience Centre telephone numbers with any issues (both of which are manned 24 hours a day). Those passengers were then proactively contacted by Northern prior to travelling in the way described above. Where necessary and where possible, Northern also provided accessible taxis to affected passengers as alternative transport. Northern's station staff were authorised to arrange accessible taxis as they deemed necessary.*

*Of the 2,578 Passenger Assist bookings made during the relevant period, complaints were made by passengers in respect of 36 journeys (i.e. a complaint rate of 1.4%)."*

- 4.38. Northern also provided a customer experience report where one of the headline issues indicated that Northern was tracking and monitoring the booked assistance system, with calls being made directly to anyone affected to agree alternative travel arrangements. For passengers who required assistance but had not booked in advance, commonly referred to as 'turn-up-and-go' assistance, Northern would alert them to any impact on their journey when they arrived at the station.
- 4.39. In both instances Northern informed us that it attempted to mitigate the impact of the disruption by, where appropriate, offering these passengers the option to use AAT, usually a taxi, as an alternative means of transport to enable them to complete their journey. Figure 2.10 in Chapter 2 provided some evidence of this in practice where the volumes of AAT utilised by Northern increased significantly over the worst periods of disruptions at the end of period 2 and into the start of period 3. However, for these passengers affected this would mean they would be able to complete their journeys but not as they had originally intended and so could have incurred some additional inconvenience.
- 4.40. Furthermore, one additional consequence of the disruption could be that passengers with disabilities simply chose not to travel. Stephen Brookes MBE, Rail Sector Disability Champion, described his perspective of the experience for rail users with disabilities in oral evidence to the Transport Select Committee on 5 September.

*“People were booking journeys but the trains were not there to connect. Of course, once the first train has missed, every other train progressively fails to communicate and interlink. People were left with no option but not to travel.”*

4.41. We also note that there was an increase in accessibility related complaint volumes pertaining to the worst periods of disruption. Therefore while the number of complaints received about accessibility issues remained at relatively low levels, it is likely that disruption of the nature experienced did present an additional challenge for disabled passengers. However, Northern put in place proactive measures to contact those passengers who had booked assistance and evidence suggests that they provided assistance to others, likely to be ‘turn-up-and-go’ passengers, at a local level through the use of alternative transport<sup>30</sup>.

## **Equipping passenger-facing staff with information**

4.42. As part of our investigation, we considered both the commitments Northern has made in relation to providing its staff with the information they need and the actual steps they took to do so in and around May 2018.

4.43. Within the standard requirements on companies regarding the provision of passenger information during disruption it is clear that employees should have access to all the information that the customer has. Northern has already set out how it aims to achieve this in its ‘local plan’ which indicates that this will be through the use of mobile phones and its internal app.

4.44. A recurring theme following the 20 May timetable change was that passengers felt that the Northern staff had little or no better information than the passengers themselves.

4.45. Whilst we accept that passengers will have access to more information now than ever before, the industry code of practice expects that staff will be able to receive at least the same level of information as passengers as a minimum. Nonetheless, even in situations where Northern staff have the same level of information, they should be able to explain the meaning behind the information so that passengers understand the context better than an average passenger could on their own.

## **Delay compensation**

4.46. Passengers who arrived at their destination more than 30 minutes late were encouraged to claim Delay Repay by Northern. Throughout the period of disruption Northern promoted Delay Repay through social media and the front page of their website. Compensation could be claimed against the timetable of the day. This also applied during the interim timetable where service levels in some areas were reduced below those expected in the May timetable.

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<sup>30</sup> See Figure 2.8.

- 4.47. Passengers using multi-modal tickets such as the MCard in West Yorkshire were not eligible for compensation under the normal terms and conditions for these tickets.



- 4.48. In addition to the Delay Repay scheme, two additional compensation schemes for Season Ticket Holders and Non-Season Ticket Holders were introduced in July and October 2018 respectively.
- 4.49. Delays and a lack of detail around the introduction of the additional Season Ticket Holder compensation scheme caused some confusion and frustration for passengers who were initially advised that the scheme would be introduced on Friday 6 July. The scheme was actually announced six days later.





- 4.50. Once the scheme was introduced some passengers took to social media to express their frustration that the additional compensation scheme for Season Ticket Holders was limited to particular routes and would preclude them from claiming via this scheme despite having also experienced travel disruption.
- 4.51. Generally, awareness amongst passengers of the differing compensation schemes was high. This was evidenced by the increased number of Delay Repay claims made particularly in periods two and three. Research conducted by Transport Focus in August 2018 also found that 87% of season ticket holders using Northern or TPE services were aware of the additional compensation scheme.

## Findings

- 4.52. We consider that the exceptional circumstances that followed the introduction of the 20 May timetable meant that providing perfect advance information for all services was, from the outset, an impossible task. There were two weeks from 20 May to 4 June where in many cases Northern passengers suffered from the provision of inadequate information, which affected their travel and journey planning. Passengers also faced disruption as a result of two RMT strike days on 24 and 26 May.
- 4.53. Our guidance to support compliance with condition 4 recognises that timetabling services and providing information to passengers are difficult, complex tasks. There is a balance to be struck between service delivery and the ability to provide appropriate, accurate and timely information for passengers during sustained periods of disruption. The licence condition is not intended to undermine the primary objective of providing best available service for passengers.
- 4.54. Against this context we consider that although passenger information was in many cases inadequate in the period between 20 May and 4 June, there is evidence to

suggest that Northern took steps to provide appropriate, accurate and timely information to the greatest extent reasonably practicable having regard to the circumstances that it faced. Northern's interim timetable was introduced on 4 June, which stabilised service levels, improved performance, reduced last-minute cancellations and enabled the provision of better information to passengers (although it is widely recognised that on some routes passengers continued to experience significant disruption following this period e.g. on the Lakes Line).

4.55. In particular, we found that:

### **Northern's service recovery up to the introduction of the interim timetable on 4 June**

4.56. In response to the timetable disruption, Northern took a number of operational decisions to try to stabilise the train service. These steps included:

- Implementation of a Gold Command Structure to provide a strategic response to the disruption including through focused leadership, co-ordination and communication (for both passengers and staff);
- Use of 'sweeper trains' to manage passenger demand – initially provided on an ad hoc basis but subsequently included in journey planners from the end of the first week of the new timetable; and
- Identification of services 'at-risk' of cancellation and use of a three-hour cut-off for decision-making regarding such services, at which point services still 'at-risk' were cancelled to provide certainty to passengers and accurate information on Customer Information System (CIS) screens.

4.57. Northern was able to implement measures aimed at improving the situation that they faced on 20 May. The decision to hold an emergency directors' meeting on 23 May and subsequently plan the interim timetable for 4 June proved fundamental to providing passengers with greater certainty over the services that they were capable of running.

4.58. Evidence indicates that whilst the quality of information provided to passengers was in many cases inadequate during the period between 20 May and 4 June, Northern did have regard to the fact that running a train service (or rail replacement bus) is only helpful to passengers if they know when and where the service will arrive, where it is going and how long the journey will take.

### **Communication and impact of the interim timetable**

4.59. Northern's interim timetable involved removing 6% of services (168 a day) from its 20 May timetable. Northern has said that this 'enabled us to accelerate our driver training,

*stabilise service levels, improve performance and significantly reduce last-minute-cancellations’.*

- 4.60. Northern operated a reduced service until 30 July, when 75% of the removed services in its interim timetable were reinstated. The Inquiry found that overall more trains were running after the interim timetable was introduced than were operating before the timetable of 20 May, and the number of minutes Northern’s services were delayed recovered to pre-20 May levels from week three onwards.
- 4.61. Northern developed a comprehensive communications plan for passengers to support the introduction of the interim timetable. The evidence we have reviewed suggests that this communications plan was appropriate both in terms of its scale and reach. Firstly, it had clear provisions for ensuring the information reached as many different types of passengers as possible by utilising multiple communications channels. Secondly, it was also targeted through key actions to ensure information was especially focused on the routes which would be most affected by the change. In particular, it gave Northern passengers access to accurate information to enable them to make or plan their journeys from the 4 June with a greater degree of certainty than had been the case in the prior two week period.
- 4.62. On the balance of evidence assessed, and as summarised in this chapter, whilst the quality of information provided to passengers was in many cases inadequate during the period between 20 May and 4 June, there is evidence to indicate that the provision of information was appropriately considered by Northern and that it subsequently took reasonable steps to provide appropriate, accurate and timely information to its passengers.

# ANNEXES

## **Annexes:**

**Annex A:** Glossary

**Annex B:** Terms of reference of investigation

**Annex C:** Condition 4 of GB Statement of National Regulatory Provisions: Passenger

**Annex D:** Legal framework and policy - Railways Act 1993 legislation

## Annex A: Glossary

CIS – customer information system – screens on platforms at stations

DARWIN - Darwin is the rail industry's official train running information system

DfT - Department of Transport

NR - Network Rail

NRE - National Rail Enquires

NTF - National Task Force

ORR - Office of Rail and Road

PIDD - Passenger Information During Disruption

RDG - Rail Delivery Group

SNRP - Statement of National Regulatory Provisions

SO - System Operator

TF - Transport Focus

TOC - Train Operating Company

TOPS - a computer system used for monitoring the progress of trains and tracking delays.

TRUST - Train Running Under System TOPS

# Annex B: Terms of Reference for the Investigation

**Annex: Terms of reference for a formal investigation into the issues relating to Arriva Rail North (Northern) provision of passenger information ahead of and after implementation of the 20 May 2018 train timetable.**

## Purpose

To establish whether Arriva Rail North (Northern) did everything reasonably practicable to meet its obligations contained in condition 4 of its' Statement of National Regulatory Provisions, namely the provision of passenger information.

## Scope

Based on initial analysis of the evidence gathered as part of our inquiry into the timetable disruption in May 2018, ORR is particularly interested in the following areas (although the investigation may be wider depending on the evidence that emerges):

The provision of appropriate, accurate and timely information provided:

- a) to passengers and prospective passengers prior to the implementation of 20 May 2018 timetable; and
- b) to passengers during the subsequent disruption over the weeks following 20 May 2018. This is a formal investigation and is separate to the ongoing monitoring and investigative informed traveller (T12) activities initiated by ORR in February 2018.

## Methodology

ORR will use evidence gathered from its current monitoring and inquiry to date and any further information provided to us in the course of this investigation including by Arriva Rail North, Network Rail, other operators, funders and other parties to assess:

- the steps Arriva Rail North has taken or is taking to address the issues, make improvements and recover;
- whether there are any systemic issues; and/or
- whether there are any mitigating factors which should be considered in this case.

## Investigation team

This investigation is led by Stephanie Tobyn as Deputy Director, using a project team drawn from consumer and network regulation functions, ORR.

## How the investigation will be conducted

In carrying out its investigation, ORR expects to draw upon information and reviews already carried out internally as part of its usual regulatory roles as well as any new information relevant parties provide to us during the course of this investigation. The review will engage primarily with Arriva Rail North, as well as Network Rail and funders. This will be a focused investigation with the aim to completing it by the end of November 2018.

# Annex C: Condition 4 of GB Statement of National Regulatory Provisions: Passenger

## Condition 4: Information for Passengers

### Purpose

1. The purpose is to secure the provision of appropriate, accurate and timely information to enable railway passengers and prospective passengers to plan and make their journeys with a reasonable degree of assurance, including when there is disruption.

### General duty

2. The SNRP holder shall achieve the purpose to the greatest extent reasonably practicable having regard to all relevant circumstances, including the funding available.

### Specific obligations

3. The following obligations in this condition are without prejudice to the generality of the general duty in paragraph 2 and compliance with these obligations shall not be regarded as exhausting that general duty. In fulfilling these obligations the SNRP holder shall at all times comply with the general duty in paragraph 2.

### Planning services

4. The SNRP holder shall cooperate, as necessary, with Network Rail and other train operators to enable Network Rail to undertake appropriate planning of train services and to establish or change appropriate timetables, including when there is disruption.
5. In particular, the SNRP holder shall:
  - (a) provide Network Rail with such information about the SNRP holder's licensed activities as may be reasonably necessary for Network Rail to fulfil its obligations relating to timetabling in its network licence;
  - (b) participate constructively in any timetabling consultation carried out by Network Rail;
  - (c) use reasonable endeavours to resolve promptly any timetabling disputes; and
  - (d) respond expeditiously to any timetabling matter which Network Rail reasonably considers to be urgent.

### Code(s) of practice and improvement plan(s)

6. The SNRP holder shall, unless ORR otherwise consents, publish one or more code(s) of practice or other documents setting out the principles and processes by which it will comply with the general duty in paragraph 2.
7. Where the SNRP holder considers, or is directed by ORR, that improvements to its arrangements for the provision of information to railway passengers and

prospective passengers are necessary or desirable to enable it better to fulfil the general duty in paragraph 2, it shall develop, publish and deliver a plan, which sets out the improvements it intends to make and the dates by which such improvements will be made.

8. The SNRP holder shall, from time to time and when so directed by ORR, review and, if necessary, revise, following consultation, anything published under paragraph 6 and any plan under paragraph 7 so that they may better fulfil the general duty in paragraph 2.
9. ORR shall not make any direction under paragraphs 7 or 8 without first consulting the SNRP holder. Provision of information to intermediaries
10. The SNRP holder shall as soon as reasonably practicable:
  - (a) provide to the holders of passenger and station licences; and
  - (b) provide to all timetable information providers on request reasonable access to appropriate, accurate and timely information to enable each on request to provide passengers with all relevant information to plan their journeys including, so far as reasonably practicable, the fare or fares and any restrictions applicable.
11. In this condition:

“Network Rail” means Network Rail Infrastructure Limited (a company registered in England and Wales under number 02904587), and its successors and assigns.

# Annex D: ORR's Approach to Economic Enforcement

## The statutory framework

ORR enforcement powers and the processes for using these powers are contained in the Railways Act 1993 ("the Act").

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. Those duties include protecting the interests of users, the promotion of competition, efficiency and economy in the provision of services and enabling operators to plan their businesses with a reasonable degree of assurance.

## Final orders

There is an obligation on ORR to make an enforcement order if we are "satisfied" that a licence condition is being contravened or is likely to be contravened, unless one of the statutory exceptions applies:

- We consider it requisite that we should make a provisional order<sup>31</sup> (see below); or
- One of the relevant statutory exceptions applies, namely:
  - Our section 4 duties preclude us from making the order<sup>32</sup>;
  - we are satisfied that the most appropriate way of proceeding is under the Competition Act 1998<sup>33</sup>; or
- The section 55 (5B) exceptions applies. This applies if we are satisfied that:
  - the licence holder has agreed to take, and is taking, all such steps as it appears to ORR for the time being appropriate to take for the purpose of securing or facilitating compliance with a condition; or
  - the contravention or apprehended contravention will not adversely affect the interests of users of railway services or lead to any increase in public expenditure,

in which case, we will only make the final order if we consider it appropriate to do so.<sup>34</sup>

Whenever the statutory exceptions (except section 55(5B)) apply, we are precluded from making a final order. Under section 55(5B), we may still impose a final order even where the substantive elements of the exception are satisfied, "if [ORR] considers it appropriate to do so".

We cannot make an order if the breach happened in the past but is not on-going. We can however impose a penalty for a past breach.

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<sup>31</sup> Section 55(2).

<sup>32</sup> Section 55(5)(a).

<sup>33</sup> Section 55(5A).

<sup>34</sup> Section 55(5B).

If we decide not to make a final order, or not to make or confirm a provisional order in respect of a licence breach, because we consider that one of the statutory exceptions applies, we must, under section 55(6) of the Act, serve notice of that fact on the licence holder and publish the notice. Although the Act does not specifically require us to set out in the notice our reasons for making such a decision, we would, as a matter of policy, expect to do so.

## Provisional orders

A provisional order is, in effect, an interim measure and may last for no more than three months unless it is confirmed. We must make a provisional order, without going through the procedural steps required for a final order, where it appears to us that it is requisite that a provisional order be made. In considering what is requisite, we must have regard, in particular, to the extent to which any person is likely to sustain loss or damage from the breach before a final order may be made.

The requirements for confirming a provisional order are substantially the same as for making a final order (see above).<sup>35</sup>

## Penalties

ORR has the discretion to impose a penalty if it is “satisfied” that a licence condition was or is being contravened. This penalty cannot exceed 10% of a licensee’s turnover.

The Act states that ORR must publish a statement of policy<sup>36</sup> in respect of the imposition of penalties. This statement can include provisions to be considered when deciding whether or not to impose a penalty. ORR must have regard to this statement of policy when deciding whether or not to impose a penalty.

## Alternative Remedies

### Other Statutory Remedies

We have considered our powers under the Competition Act 1998 and are satisfied that these do not offer the most appropriate means of proceeding.

ORR has also carried out a separate health and safety investigation<sup>37</sup> into the overruns and this will report separately.

## What our economic enforcement policy says

The purpose of enforcement is to ensure delivery and secure compliance with public interest obligations. The possibility of enforcement provides an assurance and acts as an incentive for the industry to deliver in accordance with the public interest. ORR will have regard to this policy when determining whether to pursue formal enforcement action or use alternative remedies.

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<sup>35</sup> Section 55(4).

<sup>36</sup> [https://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/4716/economic-enforcement-statement.pdf](https://orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/4716/economic-enforcement-statement.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Using our powers under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974

## The Principles of Enforcement

ORR's approach in deciding whether or not to use our formal enforcement powers in the Act is informed by best regulatory practice and the following principles:

### Proportionality

We apply the principle of proportionality to all types of licence obligations. When considering whether or not to use our formal enforcement powers we assess the circumstances of each individual case. In general we take account of the following factors:

- a) The significance of the failure, including whether it was a one-off incident or part of a systemic or sustained failure. We generally pursue enforcement action in instances where there is evidence of a sustained failure to meet licence obligations, rather than a one-off incident. For one-off incidents, we will generally only take action where it is in the public interest to do so, and where it is symptomatic of a systemic breach. We will also take into account the progress the licence holder has made to rectify the situation.
- b) The extent to which the licence holder has a robust, adequately resourced plan to achieve compliance within a reasonable period of time
- c) Whether enforcement action would encourage greater effort on the part of the licence holder to remedy the breach
- d) Any persistent non-compliance
- e) The effect on third parties and their potential right to compensation

### Targeting

ORR generally uses its enforcement powers to resolve systemic issues that are not dealt with effectively in contractual relationships. These relationships include access contracts, the Network Code, the Station Code and Depot Code, as well as industry wide arrangements on ticketing. ORR will also focus upon enforcing licence obligations where there is a detrimental effect on passengers, freight customers, funders and other stakeholders.

### Consistency

ORR aims to take a similar approach in similar circumstances to achieve similar ends. We apply the same principles in coming to a decision and ensure consistency in our approach to regulation of the industry.

### Transparency

We ensure that the industry understands what is expected of it and what is expected of ORR. This report, setting out the evidence and our decision, will therefore be published.

## Accountability

ORR is accountable to the public and our decision in respect of the overruns will be subject to scrutiny. ORR will consider any representations made to us about our approach to enforcement and use of our powers.



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