

## Rail Delivery Group

Submission

House of Commons Transport Select Committee

**Improving Rail Passenger Experience**

**Date: 25 May 2016**

# Rail Delivery Group

## Improving Rail Passenger Experience

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### Executive Summary

1. Improving passenger experience on Britain's railway is one of the Rail Delivery Group's (RDG) highest priorities. We want passengers to have the best experience possible, from the moment they start planning their journey, to the moment they exit at their destination. Our aim is to make journeys enjoyable and practical for passengers, whether they are travelling for work or for leisure.
2. Passengers will see real improvements within the next few years. The industry is working with the Department for Transport (DfT) to improve the information provided to passengers, modernise ticketing, and enhance other aspects of passenger experience. The RDG has an integral role to play in coordinating the industry and in working with the DfT to set a vision for improving passenger experience.
3. The network-wide roll-out of smart ticketing will be a key milestone in improving passenger experience on the railway. It will make it easier for passengers to buy and use tickets, provide benefits such as personalised information alerts, and will enable operators to issue automatic compensation payments. Smart ticketing is already in operation on some parts of the network, and we are working across industry, and with the DfT, to roll-out smart ticketing technology on the rest of network within the next few years. This will include a universal roll-out of mobile barcodes.
4. We know that accurate and timely passenger information is essential for passengers when planning journeys, boarding the train, catching connecting services, and making contingency plans in cases of disruption. We are working across industry to ensure that information is provided more widely, more proactively, and more accurately through all mediums. A significant step in improving passenger information will be the installation of GPS tracking technology on rolling stock, which will help us to relay more detailed and more accurate information across all channels.
5. Good Wi-Fi connectivity is important for both commuters and leisure travellers. Ensuring WiFi connectivity is fitting for modern-day requirements is a continuing challenge for the industry, with technology advancing at a very fast pace. The installation or upgrade of Wi-Fi infrastructure requires significant upfront investment, and the best way to fund this is either through bilateral agreements and funding grants from DfT, or through specification in the franchise agreements.

6. The industry needs continuing support and engagement from DfT to maintain momentum in improving specific aspects of customer experience, such as ticketing, that will provide considerable benefit for passengers. The industry would also welcome future dialogue with the Department over regulation, in particular around ensuring that fares regulation facilitates the delivery of simpler fares for passengers.
7. The DfT also has a crucial role in the implementation process of certain improvements to passenger experience. While the RDG can drive forward initiatives on improving passenger experience, we believe that the most effective way of implementing some of the required changes is through specification in franchise agreements. This allows operators to bid for contracts with foresight of required improvements, so they can factor in costs to their franchise bid.

## Introduction

8. The Rail Delivery Group (RDG) was established in May 2011. Our purpose is to enable train operators, freight operators, and Network Rail to succeed by delivering better services for their passengers. This ultimately benefits taxpayers and the economy.
9. The RDG welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Transport Select Committee's Inquiry on Improving Rail Passenger Experience on behalf of our members, who include passenger and freight train operators and Network Rail.
10. The RDG is the industry group responsible for setting the vision to improve passenger experience on the railway. The RDG works with various industry boards and schemes that draw up strategy and implement improvements. In the case of passenger experience, the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC's) Customer Experience Board is responsible for this.
11. Many of the improvements to passenger experience are spearheaded by train operators, as they respond to the ever-changing expectations of passengers. This is the case for ticketing, where a number of operators have already introduced smart card schemes. In these cases, the RDG has an important role to play in sharing best practice and encouraging other members to introduce new initiatives. This ensures the benefits are spread across the industry, to all passengers using the network.
12. ATOC's Customer Experience directorate has recently undergone a restructuring process, which has moved the organisation away from a commercial focus towards a more customerorientated approach. This ensures every aspect of customer experience is looked at from the passenger's perspective.
13. A central feature of this new approach is the 'Customer Heartbeat', which maps 108 segments of a rail journey and helps us to understand where the service we provide does not yet meet customer expectations. We have appointed 'Customer Champions' who will be responsible for implementing improvements in each of these areas and will directly liaise with TOCs to achieve this. We will also be supporting the industry with an innovation team, which will make us more responsive to the expectations of passengers. All of this work is focused on ensuring that the industry is delivering what passengers want.

## Issues

### **Information provided to passengers before, during and after rail journeys, including information provided at stations, in trains and via National Rail Enquiries, operators websites and online apps (excluding in relation to the process for claiming compensation for a delay/cancellation)**

14. Over the past few years we have made a lot of progress on improving passenger information, but we acknowledge there is more work to be done. Good customer information is a key element of a positive passenger experience on the railway. Our ultimate aim is to get the right information to passengers, when and where they need it. We will achieve this through improving staff training and guidance, and through improving the software and technology which facilitates the National Rail Enquiries (NRE) website, mobile apps, and other information sources.
15. Passengers' main source of information at stations is the live departure boards. The industry is installing new GPS technology (see paragraph 28), which will significantly improve the accuracy and level of detail that we can provide on these boards. The next most important source of information for passengers is our staff. We understand that the way passengers want to receive information has changed, which is why we are redeploying staff from ticket offices onto station platforms and concourses. We are learning from approaches such as that of Transport for London (TfL) which has made better use of its staff in providing information to passengers. We are also increasingly equipping our staff with technology, such as mobile tablets, to improve their ability to answer questions and provide information.
16. Network Rail manages some of the largest stations in Britain, including London Waterloo, Birmingham New Street, Manchester Piccadilly and Glasgow Central. Improving staff training is one of the key ways Network Rail is improving passenger information at stations. It is hiring additional coaching staff and developing an enhanced customer service course for its stations teams, which will improve the customer service staff provide. It is also making improvements to customer-facing technology – for example, improving the OIS screens that display information about disruption. In addition to this, Network Rail has started phasing train boarding, with the intention of making the process of boarding smoother and more convenient for passengers.
17. We are improving the information provided to passengers on board trains by ensuring that it is consistent and accurate. We are synchronising all information channels to our central information database, Darwin. This will resolve issues we have seen in the past where different information channels showed different information, and it will be particularly beneficial for passengers when they are on trains, where live feeds above carriage doors and on carriage ceilings are one of the main sources of information.

18. The other main source of information on trains comes from announcements via public address (PA) systems by drivers, senior conductors and train managers. The delivery of driver and staff training is the responsibility of each TOC and we produce codes of practice on driver and staff training, to act as industry benchmarks. We also play an important role by identifying solutions for TOCs, and we are currently working on improving PA systems on trains to enable TOC control centres to directly make announcements to passengers. This will be particularly useful on driver-only services and during periods of disruption, where frequency and clarity on information is expected by passengers.
19. National Rail Enquiries (NRE) is making wide-ranging improvements to the information it provides to customers through its various channels. The National Rail Enquiries (NRE) team is based within ATOC's Customer Experience Directorate, which it operates on behalf of the industry. NRE provides information to passengers via: a website, a mobile app, social media accounts, and call-centres. These channels reflect the wide range of passenger requirements and preferences for accessing information.
20. The NRE website receives 1.2 million visits each day and is constantly being reviewed and changed to make it accessible and proactive for passengers. Passengers will see further improvements later this year, through the introduction of additional features, such as a live chat – improving the ability of passengers to find information quickly and on specific issues. We are also auditing the information and language NRE uses when communicating with passengers, to make the website easily understandable and exclude jargon. NRE will also ensure greater clarity for passengers on issues like conditions of carriage – so its clearer what their ticket entitles them to. It is intended that the changes to the NRE website will act as a template for operators' websites.
21. The NRE call-centres receive 3 million calls each year and play an important role in providing human interaction with passengers in a remote setting. We understand the importance of ensuring operators provide clear and accurate information, which is why telephone calls are subject to quality control through an independent monitoring service. The results of this monitoring show the quality of this service is good.
22. We intend to go further on the information we provide to passengers via telephone. Later this year, NRE call-centre staff will be trained to use open-ended questioning techniques, which will improve the service they offer to passengers and help them find the cheapest and most appropriate ticket for their journey. This will significantly help passengers who are less comfortable using NRE's online services.
23. NRE is also improving the way it provides information to passengers through the other channels it uses to communicate. ATOC maintains a dedicated social media team for NRE, which provides information about important developments and responds to enquiries from passengers. Individual TOCs also maintain social media teams, which are essential for providing local and specific information. The industry recognises the immense value of providing an effective social media service, as passengers increasingly use social media to find information. Therefore, NRE will be extending the availability of its social media team to provide updates and answer passenger's questions to a 24 hour, 7 days a week service. NRE will also look to integrate its social media updates with other TOC social media services, to enhance reach and ensure consistency.

24. Mobile technology forms a progressively larger part of ATOC's provision. The NRE mobile app is increasingly used by passengers with smart phones, with more than 10 million downloads to date, and is steadily becoming one of the main sources of information for passengers. The industry is improving the accuracy of the information provided via the app by synchronising the data it receives with the central database – Darwin – which is used to feed live departure boards at stations. The information passengers receive via this app will be enhanced further when the industry installs GPS tracking technology on trains (see paragraph 28).
25. Periods of disruption are crucial moments when passengers require clear and timely information, which is why this is one key area that the industry is completely revamping. The industry has established a passenger information during disruption (PIDD) programme, which will be the responsibility of ATOC's Customer Experience Board to deliver. The industry is currently in the process of finalising a strategy that will establish guidelines and timeframes for the implementation of improvements.
26. We have already planned the implementation of some improvements to PIDD, such as the introduction of a dedicated customer experience team to provide information on disruption, in clear, jargon-free language, which can be relayed across all NRE channels. We are also enhancing the proactive alerts provided to passengers via NRE's mobile app; warning passengers of disruption on their routes before they arrive at the station and providing information on how they can claim compensation.
27. Network Rail is focusing on making improvements to PIDD through the National Joint Disruption Programme, which increases the focus on predicting and preventing incidents and improving the way the industry responds to and recovers from disruption. One part of this will be better communications with train operators in advance of pre-planned disruption, which will ensure better information is relayed to passengers. Network Rail is also trialling the PanNetwork Transport Coordination Centre, which is situated with London Underground's Command Centre, and which links disruption information between the rail network and the tube network. This will significantly improve PIDD for passengers in London who need to travel across both networks.
28. While the industry is working to improve the individual channels through which it communicates with passengers, we are also working to improve the clarity, accuracy and detail of the information which is distributed via these channels. We intend to achieve this by linking our central information database – Darwin – with GPS tracking technology on trains. This will enable us to gain more precise information on train movements, ascertain whether a train is mobile or stationary, and therefore relay clearer and more accurate information to our passengers.
29. Additionally, the RDG would like to reaffirm and highlight its commitment to open data. The industry will share all the data and information it uses with app and software developers and third-party websites which operate within the sector.

**Ticketing, including overcoming obstacles to the more widespread delivery of "smart-ticketing" and part-time season tickets**

30. The roll-out of smart ticketing across the railway will help us to deliver significant improvements for passengers. Convenience and accessibility are the main improvements which smart ticketing brings - it will make the purchase and use of tickets simpler and easier. Smart ticketing also provides additional benefits which cannot be achieved with cardboard ticketing, such as the ability to provide delay-repay compensation automatically. The introduction of smart ticketing will also help us improve the information we provide to passengers by allowing us to send personalised journey updates, as we gather information on each passenger's travel pattern.
31. While there is currently no network-wide smart ticketing technology, a number of TOCs have introduced or are piloting smart ticketing technologies, including: Abellio Greater Anglia, Arriva Trains Wales, C2C, Chiltern Railways, East Midlands Trains, Govia Thameslink Railway, Grand Central, Hull Trains, London Midland, Merseyrail, ScotRail, South West Trains, Virgin Trains, and Virgin Trains East Coast. In addition to this, a number of other TOCs will accept smart tickets from other operators on their services.
32. The RDG has developed a new digital ticketing vision in conjunction with the Rail Minister, which is now in the process of being implemented. In broad terms, this involves the phased introduction of two smart ticketing technologies: mobile barcodes (M-tickets) and smart cards. Our long-term aspiration is to extend smart ticketing to contactless cards. Each technology has advantages on different parts of the rail network.
33. Mobile barcodes (M-tickets) will become the industry's universal standard ticketing technology. M-tickets have been successfully piloted on routes across the network and the industry has committed to the network-wide installation of barcode ticket infrastructure. Network-wide deployment of m-ticketing infrastructure is scheduled to be completed by 2022.
34. Mobile barcodes (M-tickets) provide a number of benefits for passengers; tickets are downloaded and stored on personal mobile devices, they can be purchased at any location with an internet connection, and they can be printed if passengers would prefer to carry a print-out. Overall this makes the process of buying, storing and using a ticket much more convenient. In addition, M-tickets are accompanied by a journey itinerary, similar to airline tickets, which can provide information to passengers on train times, platforms and connecting services for their journey.
35. The roll-out of smart card and contactless card technology will provide similar benefits to passengers by making the process of buying, storing and using tickets more convenient. All technologies, including m-tickets, provide the ability to offer automatic compensation when journeys are delayed (also known as 'delay-repay'). This radically simplifies the compensation process and removes the burden of claiming from the customer. This benefit is already available for journeys on C2C and Virgin Trains, which operate smart ticketing schemes.
36. C2C is currently introducing a flexible season ticket on its route. Smart ticketing enables operators to know when passengers are travelling and the continued roll-out will facilitate the provision of part-time season tickets on the rest of the network. To make progress on the range of fares we can offer passengers, including flexible ticket options, the industry and DfT must work together on improving fares regulation.

37. The long-term goal of the industry is to move towards a 'ticket in the cloud' concept, where ticketing could even take place via customer biometrics. This could involve fingerprint recognition or another form of technology. In the interim period, the roll-out of smart ticketing technologies will provide a much improved experience for passengers.
38. The RDG has made progress by securing industry-wide agreement for its digital ticketing vision and commitment for funding the installation of m-ticketing infrastructure. However, there is still more work to be done. Timely and efficient installation and roll-out of each technology, especially the network-wide roll-out of m-tickets, requires continued momentum and coordination between industry stakeholders, in which the RDG has a crucial role to play.
39. A key challenge in this process will be integrating the railway's smart card technology with smart card technology on other devolved networks, in particular Transport for London's (TfL) oyster-card technology. The main issue is ensuring smart cards are compatible across the different types of software used by train operators, TfL, Transport for the North, Transport Scotland and other networks. We are exploring one potential solution, which would use mobile technology that is operable across all transport networks and can store multiple tickets. This would allow passengers to travel seamlessly across rail and devolved transport networks.
40. Long-term support and engagement from the DfT is essential to enable the industry to roll out network-wide smart ticketing within the next few years. It is crucial that the Department continues to work with the RDG as it coordinates implementation among its members. We would also recommend that, where the DfT has concerns or reservations, it moves swiftly to resolve these issues with industry to maintain momentum on smart ticketing.
41. The RDG would particularly welcome future engagement from the DfT over a new fares strategy and revised and simpler fares regulation to maximise the potential of new ticketing technology. New technology provides the ability to offer more flexible ticketing through features such as price capping (currently used on TfL). This removes the requirement of passengers to invest lump sums in season tickets upfront and significantly benefits passengers who work part-time or have irregular travel patterns. To allow the industry to introduce a simpler and more flexible fares system, we need the DfT to work with us to ensure that fares regulation is fit for purpose.

#### **In-train facilities, including on-journey Wi-Fi and power**

42. In-train facilities form an important part of a passenger's experience on the railway and the industry recognises it is essential to provide an in-train experience which is both enjoyable and practical. This includes ensuring trains are comfortable, clean and accessible, but also extends to the wider aspiration of making the train a place where passengers can use electronic devices and go online.
43. Each TOC is responsible for the facilities it provides on its fleet of rolling stock, and bringing improvements helps operators by encouraging passenger growth and increasing revenue. Improvements to in-train facilities can also be mandated by the DfT through specification in the franchise agreements.



44. The industry recognises the importance of Wi-Fi and power provision on trains, which is why we're upgrading the technology on rolling stock. These facilities have become increasingly important over the last decade with the increased usage of electronic devices. One of the key challenges facing the sector is keeping up with the pace of change, with wireless and mobile phone technology advancing at a rate which means infrastructure can quickly become out-of-date.
45. New technology is being installed on a route-by-route basis, either through specification in franchise agreements or through bilateral agreements between TOCs and the DfT. The original on-board mobile data technology relied on an external data link to satellites. The new technology picks up 3G and 4G signals from mobile operators and re-broadcasts it as a Wi-Fi signal on the train. This means that passengers benefit from a more consistent Wi-Fi signal and higher bandwidth. This new technology has already been installed on some franchises: Virgin Trains East Coast, Virgin Trains West Coast, East Midlands Trains and Cross Country Trains.
46. Retrofitting rolling stock with new technology requires significant upfront capital investment, which can be specified through new franchise agreements or delivered through direct grants from the DfT. The industry accepts that new Wi-Fi technology and at-seat power points should be considered the benchmark for future franchises. For current franchises where renewal is still a few years off, bilateral agreements between TOCs and the DfT are the best approach to secure funding for retrofitting of new technology.

#### **Performance measures in relation to passenger experience, including passenger survey methodologies**

47. Transport Focus conducts bi-annual National Rail Passenger Surveys (NRPS) on behalf of the industry, which is one of the key tools the industry uses to assess which areas of customer experience should be prioritised for improvement.
48. We work closely with Transport Focus to make the NRPS as useful as possible for the industry. The RDG and Transport Focus are consulting with the DfT about improving the breadth and frequency of the NRPS, to ensure the data the industry has is up-to-date and covers all aspects of passenger experience, so that we have the best picture of what passengers want and can work to deliver it.
49. We use additional research from various sources to supplement this data and complete the picture on customer experience. Individual operators also commission additional research specific to their services or route. Furthermore, train operators regularly hold meetings with the DfT to discuss the feedback they are receiving from passengers and how issues can be resolved.
50. The industry is working to oversee the introduction of real-time customer feedback software, which uses data from social media to highlight the main concerns or issues of rail passengers at any given time. This software will also enable us to analyse the effectiveness of the different initiatives we plan to carry out over the coming years.

51. The DfT and Office for Rail and Road (ORR) have the ability to mandate and request information on various performance measures. We ask that the DfT continues to work with the RDG and Transport Focus on improving the breadth and frequency of the NRPS, which will in turn improve the quality of the data the industry uses.

### **Mechanisms to hold operators to account for poor performance and spread the best practice across the industry**

52. ATOC publishes codes of practice for the rail industry which act as guidance for operators on best practice. ATOC is not a regulatory body and compliance with the codes of practice is optional, however these standards are recognised by operators as the industry benchmark. Codes of practice can become mandatory if the DfT includes them in franchise agreement specifications. These codes of practice include standards on aspects of passenger experience, for example the PIDD code of practice.
53. The National Task Force (NTF) holds operators to account over poor performance. The NTF has been in place since 1999 as an internal cross-industry meeting to provide focus on train service delivery improvement. The NTF includes representatives from the RDG, DfT and ORR. As members of the NTF, TOCs are required send empowered representatives to meetings. In cases of poor performance or anticipated poor performance, operators will be asked to discuss issues with the rest of the industry and identify how problems can be resolved or mitigated.
54. Asides from the reputational damage which poor performance causes, train operators that breach the terms of their franchise agreement with the DfT will be subject to penalties and in severe cases can have their franchise agreement terminated. As the franchising authority, the DfT is responsible for this process and the mechanisms to hold operators to account for breaching franchise agreements is entirely at its discretion. The ORR is responsible for taking action should operators breach licensing conditions.

## **Conclusion**

55. The industry is making progress on delivering improvements to passenger experience. While a number of important changes will be phased in gradually over the next few years, passengers will see a real improvement in their journey experience before the end of the decade. The most immediate and ambitious change will be the shift towards smart ticketing, which is already well underway. Once smart ticketing is universal, it will deliver a number of benefits for all passengers and will complement the provision of better and more consistent information. We know there's still much more work to be done. As we make improvements and set out further visions for change, we require continued support from DfT to ensure that momentum on improving passenger experience is maintained.

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