

ATOC Approved Code of Practice – Passenger Information During Disruption

Synopsis

Submitted by



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This Approved Code of Practice sets out the principles by which Railway Undertakings should respond to incidents affecting train running, including those that may involve trains owned or leased by another such Undertaking.

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Part A

Issue Record

This Approved Code of Practice will be updated when necessary by distribution of a complete replacement.

Issue	Date	Comments
One	October 2009	Original version
Two	November 2009	Change of ATOC signatory
Three	March 2012	Fully revised version
Four	July 2014	Revised following industry review

Responsibilities

This Approved Code of Practice is made available to all member companies of the ATOC Train Operations Scheme. Recipients should ensure that copies are made available as required to those within their own organisations for whom its content is relevant.

Explanatory Note

This Approved Code of Practice is intended to reflect good practice and is advisory only. The extent to which a receiving organisation chooses to comply with any or all of its contents is entirely at its own discretion.

Supply

Copies of this Approved Code of Practice may be obtained from the ATOC members' website.

Part B

1. Background

Feedback from customers consistently tells us that the flow of information about train services that are experiencing disruption is a priority for them and is an area we need to focus on more strongly. Whilst it is recognised that Railway Undertakings have the responsibility for managing the relationship with their own customers, the interconnected nature of the rail industry dictates that a coordinated approach to the provision of passenger information during major delays/disruption is appropriate and important.

Passenger Information During Disruption (PIDD) aims to help Railway Undertakings address these issues in a broadly consistent manner.

2. Purpose

This document sets out high-level guidance about generic good practice in the provision of information to customers during disruption. It provides individual operators with a framework that they can tailor according to local circumstances.

3. Scope

This ACoP applies to all Railway Undertakings (franchised and open-access) as appropriate.

4. Related Documents

This ACoP supports the relevant provisions in the Network Code, Railway Operations Code (ROC) and does not amend or alter their provisions in any way.

This ACoP should be read in conjunction with:

- ATOC/ACOP014 - Provision of Passenger Information;
- Information Development Group's Good Practice Guides for Providing Customer Information; and
- Network Rail's "Guidance Note for Control, Response and Station Staff: Information During Disruption".

5. Aims and Objectives of PIDD

To enable the timely and reassuring provision of correct and consistent information to passengers during major disruption/delays so that they can make well-informed travel decisions.

In addition to systems-based solutions of varying types, it is the commitment of customer-facing teams – and crucially those supporting and feeding information to them – that is of absolute importance in the delivery of PIDD.

6. Interface with Network Rail and Other Organisations

Railway Undertakings and Network Rail have a duty to work closely together and co-operate over all aspects of passenger information, including but not exclusively during periods of disruption.

Information from the site of an incident forms the key initial stage in the information chain. Network Rail takes the lead role at all operational incidents and has procedures setting out their response to such incidents, including as they relate to passenger information.

The ability of Railway Undertakings to provide consistent and timely information to passengers during disruptive incidents – as detailed in this ACoP – is heavily dependent on the flow of information from Network Rail, particularly in reference to:

- estimates and information from the site of an incident/disruptive event;
- cause of the delay; and
- production of plans for the restoration of services.

Station Facility Owners (SFO) are also required to work with Railway Undertakings and co-operate in the dissemination of information in a non-discriminatory way that looks after passengers' needs regardless of train operator. It is noted that not all SFOs are Railway Undertakings.

7. Compliance

This document introduces PIDD and its principal components and points to the more detailed key requirements that need to be identified, agreed and implemented locally.

Railway Undertakings should develop a local plan/s to deliver information to passengers during disruptive incidents based on the guidelines in this ACoP and in close co-operation with Network Rail. These plans should be reviewed annually and be owned by individual Railway Undertakings.

Where compliance is not possible because of practicality, available funding, technology or other constraints this should be documented in each Railway Undertaking's local plan.

Local circumstances and the flexible and collaborative approach required to recover a disrupted train service can also lead to alternative local solutions being adopted on a planned or unplanned basis. Railway Undertakings are not discouraged from stepping outside of the guidelines in this Code of Practice providing it is undertaken consciously and believed to be in the best interests of passengers. The local plan should document the planned divergences and unplanned on-the-day alterations so that they may be considered during the incident review process.

7.1 Measures

- National quantitative research is commissioned to measure the quality of information during disruption for all Railway Undertakings and Railway Undertakings are required to publish the results;

- Railway Undertakings should monitor the quality of their own output for CSL2 incidents according to the Information Development Group criteria;
- Each Railway Undertaking should have its Core Messages audited by a third party (e.g. another Railway Undertaking) at least once annually; and
- Railway Undertakings and Network Rail should hold cross-industry reviews of local plans in order to make sure they are up-to-date and also share good practice.

8. Key Requirements

This section breaks down the effect of disruptive incidents and the actions to be taken into functional sections. All are ultimately important in the provision of information to passengers but by breaking them down, functions are able to focus more closely on their own deliverables whilst retaining an understanding of the overall scene.

- Each local plan should reference each part of this section, identifying the actions taken, other mitigating measures or explaining why it is not relevant or why an alternative process is more appropriate for local conditions. Additional information that should be included is shown in bold after each entry.

8.1 General

Service Disruption Thresholds & Customer Service Level 2 (CSL2)

Each Railway Undertaking should define its Service Disruption Threshold/s above which these PIDD arrangements will apply along with the ways of determining this; the enhanced level of mobilisation that results will be referred to as Customer Service Level 2 (CSL2). These thresholds may be Railway Undertaking/route-specific or be more locally targeted and can take into account such things as service frequency/number of passengers along with passenger feedback/research. The triggers are likely to be both objective and subjective.

The declaration of CSL2 allows a wider understanding of the issues throughout the industry, notably amongst other Railway Undertakings who are able to provide assistance, and is accepted as the trigger required for additional assistance.

CSL2 should be declared once the Service Disruption Threshold/s have been reached, unless there is good reason why it should not be, and flexibility remains with the Control Room to declare it in other circumstances for the benefit of customers.

Understanding of the end-to-end PIDD process

The end-to-end PIDD process involving Network Rail/other suppliers should be clearly determined.

In order to effectively deliver the above requirements within the Railway Undertaking, Control and Customer Service teams should have an understanding of the overall PIDD process and its aims and objectives with special reference to the following aspects/principles:

- enhanced mobilisation – CSL2;
- prioritised plans; and
- Holding & Core Messages.

It is envisaged that over time, at least an appreciation of this ACoP should be included in the training/competence modules for all relevant personnel.

8.2 Operations

In the Control Room

The Control Room (however organised) is central to the provision of good passenger information. Information is, and must be seen as, an integral part of the Control Room's primary function, either during periods of perturbation or otherwise, and the following information-critical requirements are important:

Issue of a Holding Message

When an incident occurs that is likely to breach a Railway Undertaking's CSL2 threshold, a Holding Message should be issued within 10 minutes, unless there is a good reason not to do so.

- Identify/agree locally where responsibility rests, the style of the message, channels used and a 'within' time.

Holding Messages are designed to give initial advice that disruption is occurring and delays will result and encourage passengers and staff to be alert for further information.

Mobilisation of Operations and Customer Service response teams

The Control Room is responsible for engaging/mobilising Railway Undertaking operational/technical resources along with additional customer service response staff to enable customers to be looked after appropriately.

- Identify locally in greater detail how this will be achieved including reference to pre-agreed control manual/on-call arrangements.

Alterations to train services

The reliance on automated systems to give information to passengers means that any alterations to train services (including cancellations/short journeys/missed stations) should be input into industry systems as quickly as possible.

Contingency plans

Each Railway Undertaking has pre-determined contingency plans that may or may not include contingent timetables that act, as a minimum, as ready references to an appropriate course of action during set circumstances.

- It is appropriate for these to be referenced.

Cause of the disruption

To ensure that the provision of information to customers and frontline customer service teams is consistent, Railway Undertaking Control teams should agree with their Network Rail colleagues (and with each other if the incident affects more than one Railway Undertaking) how they will use customer-facing language to describe events and ensure that this is presented consistently.

Control Room immediate actions

- Document the immediate actions of the Railway Undertaking Control Room/s that cover all items in this section tailored to their specific needs, operational area and cross-reference to existing relevant plans and procedures i.e. on-call support; and
- Railway Undertakings should carry out an audit of their messaging address books at least once annually to ensure that other Railway Undertakings and NRCC addresses are included.

8.3 Customer Service

Holding/Core Messages

In the event of a CSL2-type incident, both passengers and frontline staff will require rapid and consistent information about the circumstances and choices that they have. Information at the start of an incident may be sparse and is likely to change over time as more detail becomes available and on this basis it is important to a) rapidly provide such information as is available – which at the start of an incident may not be detailed, but should include an estimate at the earliest opportunity – and b) update it as the situation changes or at no more than 20 minute intervals. It is possible for incidents that are on-going in nature for a ‘steady state’ to be achieved where the message frequency can be reduced.

- Frequency, format and originator of messages along with background detail regarding the internal information flows required to populate them.

Messages should follow a three-step format:

Problem – What has occurred?

Impact – What does it mean for passengers?

Advice – What passengers should do?

- Examples of template messages should be shown. ‘Good Practice Guide for Customer Information’ gives further information; and
- Where no estimate is available, Controls should include within the message advice of when the disruption can be expected “at least until”.

Alternative Routes and Ticket Validity

Passengers should be provided with sufficient information to make informed decisions about alternative arrangements during service disruption and should also be aware of what alternative trains/routes their tickets will be accepted on.

- Railway Undertakings should identify the most appropriate/regularly used alternative routes (where they exist and including other modes as appropriate) and how these are presented to passengers; and
- Railway Undertakings should include details of their pre-agreed Ticket Acceptance policies with other Railway Undertakings/other transport providers along with the trigger arrangements and how they are communicated internally, within the industry and to passengers.

Cheapest Ticket and Do Not Travel policies

Railway Undertakings should agree a Cheapest Ticket Policy for implementation as necessary during service disruption. In principle, this means that if a passenger intended to travel on a route that is disrupted that has a cheaper fare then that cheaper fare should still apply.

In extreme circumstances where there are no reasonable alternatives Railway Undertakings are able to issue a Do Not Travel warning (note that it is only Railway Undertakings that are able to do this).

Other Railway Undertakings' passengers

The nature of the rail network means that many passengers use connecting trains travelling with more than one Railway Undertaking in a single journey. During disruptive incidents passengers should not be discriminated against on the basis of operator and efforts should be made to deliver the same high standards to everyone. This includes passengers travelling on Railway Undertaking-specific tickets who have been re-routed onto another Railway Undertaking's trains because of disruption.

Information about other Railway Undertaking's disruption, where relevant, should be sought using the established channels, with escalation measures in place in the event of non-supply to ensure the best outcome for passengers.

8.3.1 At the Station

Stations have a key role in the provision of timely information and station-based teams should understand their role in the provision of information to passengers during disruption and what the additional requirements of CSL2 are.

Grouping stations together

When CSL2 is declared it is useful to reduce the demands made on the Control Room and a subsidiary method of comms between stations may be appropriate (for example, one that identifies 'hub' and 'satellite' stations).

Customer Information Screens (CIS)

The accuracy of CIS becomes even more important during service disruption and is important to both passengers and staff. Keeping these systems both updated and relevant must be a priority for the station operator and consideration should be given to showing only trains that are running when large numbers of cancelled trains are involved.

- Station operators should document their policy for the suppression of non-critical messages and the action that can be taken if message integrity becomes poor/the system is overwhelmed.

Announcements

Announcements should be consistent with CIS but be supplemented as necessary with information from the Core Message. It is recognised that speech is a faster medium and may be used for targeted information in a meaningful way to passengers.

Live announcements by members of staff should generally be used to convey information about delayed and disrupted train services in preference to pre-recorded announcements as they better demonstrate that someone cares and is in charge. Where this is not possible, use should be made of automated announcements - it is better that passengers receive an automated announcement to the effect that the delay is being investigated than no announcement at all.

8.3.2 On the Train

On the train, the primary responsibility for looking after passengers, especially during disruption, rests with on-train teams and includes train crew, revenue protection staff and others as appropriate.

Information flow

The flow of information to passengers is of importance and on-train teams should, ideally, be at least as well informed as passengers with web access. A range of technological devices are now available and each Railway Undertaking should determine what is appropriate for their operation.

Driver Only Operation (DOO) makes this difficult to achieve in all circumstances and Railway Undertakings to which it is relevant should define their plans in this respect. It is noted that passengers' need for information remains the same whether on a DOO train or otherwise.

Sharing information

Where there is more than one member of staff on a train it is important that any information received is shared, especially where this information comes via the driver. During times of disruption valuable information regarding the train service often arrives firstly from the signaller.

Announcements

In addition to giving information about the disruption and what it means for the customers on the train, announcements serve to provide reassurance. During CSL2-level disruption the Core Message information can be used as the basis for on-train announcements, although in the absence of details about the incident/delays, basic information should still be given. As for station announcements, live announcements should be made whenever possible with automated used as an alternative when otherwise no information would be provided.

Face-to-face customer service

Extra reassurance is given where on-train teams are able to walk through the train and talk to passengers in person and where this is possible, passengers do appreciate it.

8.3.3 Internet, Social Media and Telephone

Information published via the internet should reflect that contained in the Holding/Core Messages but may be supported with further in-depth information that allows passengers to make informed judgements about their travel plans, including where it is sensible not to travel or take an alternative route, alongside photos of the incident where these are available.

The immediate nature of this medium means that regular updating and real-time monitoring of online information given to passengers is needed – this includes monitoring what it being disseminated by the Railway Undertaking itself, other Railway Undertakings, National Rail Enquiries and news outlets (e.g. BBC/Sky News).

A map of the affected area and any alternative routes along with information about ticket acceptance on other Railway Undertakings/modes should be included.

Alerts via SMS/e-mail/social media should be consistent with other industry systems/channels, as far as this is possible.

Information given by telephone should also reflect the Holding/Core Message and staff answering calls need access to real time information systems that allow them to give advice on the disruption, what it means to the caller and what alternative choices they have.

8.4 Learning for the Future

PIDD – Focused Incident Reviews

It is recognised that reviewing past events is the best way to learn for the future and continuously improve. Reviews of major disruptive incidents should include, or address separately, issues purely relating to the customer and the flow of information to them and the teams who are helping them, including third parties.

- Railway Undertakings should define when/how a review takes place and set-out the contents relating to PIDD/customer service including who should be involved and the speed of action post-incident.

9. Definitions and Glossary

Cheapest Ticket Policy

A Railway Undertaking's fare policy that ensures customers are not penalised during disruption.

Control Room

The Railway Undertaking control activities that are responsible for managing train service delivery on a real time basis. In addition to service recovery/incident management, this includes information to staff, passengers and third parties.

Core Message

A jargon-free message issued by a Control Room during major delays/disruption at intervals defined in the PIDD-DS when CSL2 is in force.

Core Messages contain information under three headings:

Problem – What has occurred?

Impact – What impacts will this have on passenger journeys (incl. time estimates, where available)?

Advice – What passengers should do?

Customer Service Level 2 (CSL2)

This term describes the enhanced mobilisation that enables delivery of enhanced information and associated Railway Undertaking-specific customer service requirements during major delays/disruption.

Do Not Travel Warning

A structured advice issued by Railway Undertakings during major delays/disruption when travel is not recommended. This can only be issued by Railway Undertakings and will take into account any viable alternatives.

Good Practice Guides

Documents containing identified good practice and advice issued by ATOC from time to time on behalf of Passenger Information Strategy Group.

Holding Message

A message issued by a Control Room containing available details of an incident/disruption and the impact on service to provide initial advice of a disruptive event.

Major Delays/Disruption

A level of disruption above a Railway Undertaking's defined service disruption threshold.

Passengers

This term relates to:

- Customers undertaking a journey, i.e. on a train/station and including transfers to LUL;
- Intending passengers – at stations that are yet to commence their journey; and
- Meeters & greeters – people waiting at stations/other locations for passengers.

Service Disruption Threshold

The level of disruption above which CSL2 will apply (determined by individual Railway Undertakings).

Ticket Acceptance Policy

A Railway Undertaking policy that covers the following key aspects during disruption:

- Disrupted trains;
- Travel by alternative routes;
- Decision making on the day;
- Communications on the day;
- Ticket issuing during disruption; and
- Periods of amnesty.