

Office of Rail Regulation Consultation: issued 29 March 2011

Amending licences to give passengers the information they need to plan and make journeys – a consultation

The Office of the Rail Regulator is undertaking a consultation on their proposal to amend operator licences to give passengers the information they need to plan and make journeys.

- 1) The paper proposes an amendment to licences **to make clear that train operators have lead responsibility for getting good quality information to their passengers**, building on the existing obligation to work with Network Rail on timetable planning.
- 2) It proposes a corresponding amendment to Network Rail's network licence to clarify its lead role in planning services and providing the vital information to train operators that they need to do their job.
- 3) It also proposes an obligation in station licences for station operators to play their part in delivering the information.

The Centro response:

All such information needs to be appropriate, accurate and timely to allow passengers (and perspective passengers) to plan their journeys.

- Information plays a critical role in the public perception of the railway industry and dictates how the individual is able to make an informed choice about their opportunities for travel and connectivity on public transport.
- As has been confirmed in recent survey work carried out by Passenger Focus, passengers want better information, earlier notification of delays and more help from railway staff when delays happen.
- The Autumn 2010 National Passenger Survey indicated that only 40% of passengers are satisfied with the way delays are handled compared to an overall satisfaction levels of over 80%.
- The severe weather of late 2010 once again placed a strain on industry information systems and staff just when passengers were seeking extra information and advice.
- Passengers need access to accurate, timely, up to date and easy to understand information at all stages of a journey.
- Rapid developments in information technology are continually opening up new ways to inform passengers and raising their expectations. But

while Information Technology is transforming the way in which public transport information can be distributed and personalised, the need to get the basics right remains as important as ever.

- For most rail passengers across the West Midlands there are plenty of 'information holes' still to be plugged. It is all too easy for a rail journey to be inconvenienced through the lack of timely, appropriate and accurate information, be it through a missed connection or buying the incorrect ticket.

To summarise:

- Throughout the Centro area there has been positive steps forward in the provision of passenger information, but at the same time demands and expectations are rising.
- Despite the rail industry generally providing an adequate service, it is the 'one-off' "bad experiences" that create the lasting impression.
- Inconsistency of information remains a problem
- Lack of information creates frustration and lack of confidence in the network
- Development of new technology should not divert attention from getting the basics right!
- Arrangements are less satisfactory when there is severe disruption to services. However this is the time of greatest need!

Do you agree that there is a lack of clear accountability in the current framework for providing information to passengers?

Centro agree that the full responsibilities for providing good quality information to passengers are not clearly defined anywhere and this lack of clarity is particularly noticeable at times of unplanned disruption. Conditions in operator franchise agreements can vary meaning there is often an inconsistent approach to information across the network. There is often an inability for the industry to disseminate useful information quickly to passengers. This includes the opportunities that other modes of public transport may provide for alternative travel arrangements.

Do you agree that licences are the best place to set out aligned accountabilities for providing information?

Whilst accepting that this method represents a suitable way to align responsibilities and accountabilities in a clear but flexible way, it does place on train operators more administrative burden. Notably there is no increased

obligation for them to do any more than they have already committed to do voluntarily. Such a measure may actually deflect them from practical cross – party working to deliver noticeable and substantive change to attitudes and cultures across complex and diverse operating environments such as that centred on the West Midlands. There is also a risk that by over-specifying requirements in operator licences, this will actually act as a disincentive to innovation. It is critical in multi operator environments that operator’s are encouraged to look beyond their own obligations, to deliver solutions that cover all operators and also other modes, where appropriate. For example, between Wolverhampton and Birmingham there are four rail operators, a metro line and bus links, all of which need effective co-ordination from an information perspective.

Do you agree the split of responsibilities described is sensible?

It is important that Network Rail is correctly and fully aligned into any new arrangements as the ability to reschedule timetables at times of disruption is critical to ensuring that train operator resources are best deployed and that national electronic databases are accurately and speedily updated.

Are there any other changes in the way the industry handles information for passengers that would complement new licence obligations and help the industry deliver the needed improvements?

There is need for increased dialogue with PTEG and Integrated Passenger Transport Authorities and we would expect this to be included in any licence amendments.

Centro would welcome alignment of requirements to our “*Integrated Passenger Transport Strategy*” (see Appendix I) which was approved by our Transport Strategy Committee earlier this year. The Strategy identifies 10 key Passenger Information Principles which have universal relevance regardless of mode.

Centro now has regular dialogue with London Midland over a range of information and knowledge sharing issues. London Midland (alongside the other operators) was fully consulted on our Strategy and therefore understands our future aims and objectives.

Centro recently provided £4.5m of funding support to deliver “real-time” Passenger Information systems at over 60 local rail stations. In response to this commitment London Midland have delivered a dedicated “Local Information Control Centre” within their Control function and operational information is now more freely disseminated across their network for both generic and “line of route” specific incidents.

Whilst information at stations has significantly improved there remains far less impetus to operators to provide “on vehicle” information. Centro believe this represents a significantly “gap” where future improvements can be delivered.

Do you have any suggestions to improve the proposed licence drafting?

The new obligation for station operators should take full account of proposals by Centro and other PTEs to take a greater control of local stations, and also needs to be flexible enough to reflect other rail industry changes which are likely to emerge as a result of the McNulty review.

Who do you think should be covered by these proposals?

There remains a need for the rail industry (i.e. NRES, TOCs & Network Rail) to pro-actively share their “rail data feeds” with public transport bodies so that users can optimise their travel opportunities. Nowadays this is particularly relevant given the increased access and convenience of web-based “journey planning” tools to interrogate information “on the move” and the continuing commitment to roll-out complementary information systems “off the rail network” at interchanges, tram stops, travel shops and at roadside locations.

This knowledge base should include access to train operator retailing information including local rail fares and ticketing validities.

There should also be consideration of the role ROSCO’s have to play in delivery of progressive “on board” passenger information facilities such as “real-time” displays and Wi-Fi.

What impact do you think these proposals would have?

There should be improved awareness of the total public transport offering across metropolitan areas such as the West Midlands.

Information sharing needs to become a “two way process” with Integrated Transport Authorities offering similar “open access” to their electronic databases, real-time information systems and timetables etc

Centro would welcome if such proposals supported the need for appropriate staffing of stations to provide the required assurances to passengers in the offering of personalised travel information.

What extra information about how these conditions would work in practice would be useful?

How will the proposed measures manifest themselves in a visible and tangible way to passengers in the next year?

From a PR perspective it would be beneficial for the rail industry to communicate a more “joined-up” Passenger Information Improvement Plan for this autumn in expectation of the forthcoming winter months when disruption is more likely.

How would these new conditions impact on providing better and easier “way-finding” at stations and across the network?

How is the need for better “Information for All” incorporated in your proposals?

END