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21 August 2019

Dear Anthony

Thank you for your letter to both me and Andrew Haines, dated 31 July sharing passengers' experiences of how the rail industry dealt with the extreme temperatures on Thursday 25 July 2019. As this is both RDG's and Network Rail's challenge we have written a joint response to your letter.

Let us start by apologising to our customers - on behalf of the industry we are sorry passengers experienced significant disruption and uncomfortable conditions. Railway colleagues worked tirelessly to try and get all passengers to where they wanted to travel to. All involved will tell you it was an awful day for many of our passengers.

We knew ahead of 25 July that extreme heat was predicted, and that travel would be uncomfortable. We reduced the number of services running across the network to mitigate against congestion as a result of reduced line speeds and any other operational issues. Many Train Operating Companies issued a 'Do Not Travel or Do Not Travel unless essential' message prior to Thursday 25th July. However, some Train Operating Companies' gate line data shows this did not reduce travel as much as was expected. We believe this is an area we can learn from the transport industry and would like to explore this with you.

Network Rail and train operators have made progress in how we manage large disruptions and keep our passengers informed. At one stage, we encountered at least four simultaneous overhead line failures. This meant that normal parallel route options of using Euston, St Pancras, Kings Cross and Liverpool Street were not available to customers. We are working together to understand how to improve multi-route coordination and communication when the usual 'alternative travel' options are not applicable.

The safety of our customers and colleagues is paramount, which is why during extreme weather conditions mitigation plans are put in place. The unprecedented temperatures on that day, which saw track temperatures in some places reach 57 degrees, meant speed restrictions on several parts of the network were necessary to avoid rails buckling. This resulted in delays and cancellations with 18% of the typical daily services cancelled or partly cancelled. Significant disruption was also caused by the failure of overhead line equipment, which is more challenging to prepare for.

We are working together to carry out a far-reaching review of the railway's ability to operate in extreme temperatures which are likely to become the norm rather than the exception. The review will look at the impact of such conditions on passengers and colleagues and develop a new operational plan for managing hot weather. We are also currently building on the communications aspects of existing industry operational crisis management structures to ensure we are more coordinated and therefore resilient in the event of evolving incidents, including weather related events.

The National Performance Board (successor of National Task Force) will monitor the extreme temperatures review and the railway's plans to address the issues you have identified. In the annexe to this letter, we have addressed each of these issues and the initiatives we have under way.

Susie Homan (RDG) and Nick King (Network Rail) have arranged to meet Guy Dangerfield to discuss this response and to ensure all parties are up to date with customer initiatives within each business. When they meet they can agree how best to keep everyone informed and up to date.

Yours sincerely



Paul Plummer
Chief Executive, Rail Delivery Group

Annexe

Preparing for hot weather

We will do all we can to prevent incidents that cause disruption and make sure we're ready to respond to problems quickly so that customers and staff are safe.

Following a review of last year's heat related issues, which were primarily track related, we focussed our work this summer on track and signalling at critical locations.

Network Rail activated its 'extreme weather action teams' across the country five days ahead of the high temperatures, working closely with train operators, fire service, ambulance and police. Passenger and colleague welfare remained our key focus throughout the disruption. On the day local teams rose to the challenge in many areas, but we recognise we need to do more to provide accurate and timely information to passengers and other railway users.

The plan in place produced a 50% reduction in track buckle incidents in the run up to 25 July when compared to 2018. The plan on the 25th July reduced services through planned cancellations and this, along with the interventions in the last year on signalling, provided a reasonably reliable service on many routes. However, there were several overhead line de-wirements on the day which resulted in severe delay and significant reductions in the overall network's ability to operate trains, particularly in and out of the key London stations to the Midlands and the North. The temporary speed restrictions put in place to protect the track do not protect or materially mitigate the risk of overhead line expansion and resulting de-wirement.

Improving how we manage hot weather

The review of the railway's ability to operate in extreme temperatures and how we provide a better service to passengers will look in detail at preparations for July 25th, delivery of the plan and the impact this had on colleagues and customers.

It will result in a short-term "Operational Plan" for future extreme heat events, aiming to meet the customer expectation on us to run trains, with an improved ability to communicate to customers in a timelier manner when we can.

There will be a review of technical standards, benchmarking with domestic and international operators, to agree what is needed to build greater resilience to extreme hot weather. For example, raising the critical rail temperature and reducing failures of overhead lines. It is also important to consider where work to improve heat resilience, such as replacing fixed tension overhead lines with variable tension equipment, may require longer possessions. At present our railway is designed for a temperate climate and not a climate of extreme heat or cold and for this to be fully addressed significant investment will need to be made.

We will review our front-line response capability to learn from the areas where the teams went the extra mile. For example, in the Southern region more than 60,000 bottles of water and 10,000 ice creams were handed out and onboard trains those that carry stock handed out bottles of water. These types of measures are what should be planned and enacted on extreme event days like the one we recently experienced.

Thank you for recognising the importance of the industry guidance note on Meeting the Needs of Passengers Stranded on Trains. This guidance was recently reissued, in June, following a review of the experiences at Lewisham. RDG will review how well the guidance was followed on 25 July and will ask for feedback on any weaknesses identified with the guidance, when putting it into practice. RDG and Network Rail will also review the guidance note in light of a predicted increase of hot weather to consider if it is still fit for purpose. Any issues identified will be addressed.

Improving Passenger Information

Our passengers experience is a priority, whether there is disruption or not, so we welcome your comments that our colleagues did a great job in many cases. Our work so far to better handle disruption is reflected in the improving National Rail Passenger Survey scores for information delivery during disruption. However, we recognise we can do much better.

For Network Rail, providing passengers, and particularly those who require additional assistance, with timely, accurate and accessible information, during both normal and disrupted service, is a vital building block in realising the organisation's ambitions to be an organisation on the side of passengers.

As a direct result of lessons learnt from 25 July, we are committed to:

- Bringing forward our industry awareness campaign for Delay / Repay to September. This will build upon the campaign we ran in the spring and include social media, websites and back of ticket advertising.
- Across all retail and information channels, we will make it clearer to customers what their rights are if they decide not to travel or are advised against travel.

RDG's recently endorsed Customer Information Strategy cited three areas of specific focus - information when the customer needs it, complete information for the customer and personalised information according to each customer's specific needs. This strategy contains a number of initiatives to significantly improve passenger information, many of which we have already commissioned pilots for or dedicated resources.

- **Internet of Trains:** We now collect information in real-time from one train operator that monitors whether the air conditioning is working or not. If this pilot is successful, we will roll it out on a wider scale. The pilot also includes collecting other information in real-time like whether on-train toilets and station lifts are working, along with train loading information.
- **Disruption mapping:** The industry researched disruption to map from when an incident occurs, through to the information being presented to the customer. This research identified nine areas of focus, including improving the quality and timeliness of information to colleagues and passengers alike and cited the work recently done by Virgin as part of their "back on track" initiative as an example of good practice. This initiative has already improved the information provided to Virgin colleagues and led to a significant increase in passenger satisfaction during disruption. The industry will use this research to develop plans to improve the timeliness, accuracy and availability of information.
- **Putting information in customers hands:** The industry has supported a pilot which has more than 30,000 passengers who get personalised alerts and information about their journey through Facebook messenger. Passengers are notified of any disruption and provided alternative travel options to complete their journey. When a disruption goes above a delay / repay threshold, the customer will receive an alert with a link to make a claim from their train operator.
- **Better on-train information:** Our research highlighted that information on trains was a key area for improvement. To address this, we have developed 'Darwin for Trains' which provides train running connection information specific to the train the passenger is travelling on.