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Dear Ian

## **Information provision on Valley Lines, 22 and 23 July 2014**

Thank you for inviting us to assist you in understanding where, based on the incidents on 22 and 23 July, information provision during service disruption could be improved. We requested information from ATW, Nexus Alpha and National Rail Enquiries; the findings set out below are based on analysis of that information. I am pleased to report that we have had full cooperation from all parties.

### **Processing train cancellations and alterations in industry systems**

In the 48 hours of 22 and 23 July, ATW sent 316 train service messages via Tyrell. 71 (22%) were sent before the train was scheduled to depart from its origin station; 208 (66%) were sent during the course of the train's journey; and 37 (12%) were sent after the train completed its journey. There were 67 outright cancellations, but only 38 Tyrell messages were sent about cancelled trains. The fact that over 75% of alterations were made after the train in question was scheduled to depart, and only 57% of cancellations appear to have been communicated at all, suggests that ATW did not keep Darwin sufficiently accurate for it to meet the needs of passengers. The National Rail Communication Centre (NRCC) commented "*there were a number of trains in delayed status where perhaps a Tyrell update showing it as cancelled or part cancelled may have helped the passenger*". The feedback received from passengers supports this view, for example "*The Arriva Trains Wales website is confusing and was still listing trains as being delayed from 1200 (at c. 1635). This site should contain as much information as possible – no information of use was provided. I rang 08457 484950 and was told that the trains were running on time!!*" Another passenger said: "*2 hours I was stuck on a platform because trains were obviously cancelled despite what I was being told by your App, the helppoint, twitter and whatever number I called you publish on your website*". Another passenger said "*The notice board at the station and the mobile site said 'on time' despite being*



*20 minutes late*". Almost all passenger-facing information is already driven from Darwin, and within a few months your station customer information system (CIS) will be as well, and yet keeping Darwin fully accurate for a reasonable 'window' ahead does not appear to have been a high priority. Many of the things passengers were frustrated about have their heart in this failure.

**Recommendation 1:**

**That ATW examines:**

- i. whether it attaches sufficient priority to keeping Darwin accurate, given the direct consequences for passengers (and staff) if it is not**
- ii. if resourcing is adequate for this critical task**
- iii. if best use is being made of the National Rail Communication Centre to help keep Darwin accurate during disruption**

At our meeting with your team on 5 September we heard that in disruption decisions to cancel a train or terminate short are often made at very short notice, in part because of complicated train crew diagrams. As a result it proves impossible to provide more than a minute or so's notice – if any notice – as to whether a particular train will or won't run. It appears that if passengers' experiences during Valley Lines disruption is *ever* going to improve significantly, ATW must make decisions about cancellations and amended calling patterns sufficiently early that downstream systems can give meaningful information to passengers needing to know if their train is going to run.

**Recommendation 2:**

**That ATW examines:**

- i. how decisions regarding cancellations and amendments during disruption can be made earlier, in order that passengers receive meaningful information about services in the hour ahead**
- ii. if what on paper are efficient train crew diagrams import inherent fragility to running the train service at times of disruption, so outweighing that efficiency. Other train operators have concluded that accepting a higher driver/conductor establishment than would be necessary in a perfect world is justified to minimise disruption**

**Customer Service Level 2 (CSL2) messaging – quality of core messages**

The core messages issued on these dates contain a number of inconsistencies and ambiguities – acknowledged at the 5 September meeting – and the "advice" element of the 'problem, impact, advice' structure was generally weak. For example, Core Message 3 at 1425 on 22/07 contained the information "all routes available at Queen Street North Junction" and the contradiction "Owing to signalling problems at Cardiff Queen Street all lines are blocked". Core Message 2 at 1322 on 22/07 advised that all lines are blocked, but also that trains "may be cancelled or delayed by up to 60 minutes". If the line is closed, there is no *may* about it. Core



Message 4 at 1531 on 22/07 simultaneously states “signalling normally” and “owing to signalling problems at Cardiff Queen Street all lines are blocked”. Core Message 13 at 1934 on 23/07 states Network Rail staff en route, when Network Rail had tweeted at 1541 that engineers are on site. Reading the core messages gives a strong sense that they are not constructed from a “what does the reader need to know?” perspective, whether that reader is a member of staff or a passenger. In summary, it appears that ATW’s core messages on 22 and 23 July did not achieve their objective of providing clear, accurate, trustworthy information on which staff and passengers can rely.

### **Recommendation 3**

- i. That ATW takes steps to significantly improve the quality, timeliness and usefulness of its core messages, with a particular focus on providing what the recipient, staff or passenger, needs to know.**
- ii. That ATW devises a means of measuring the quality of core messages to aid learning and continuous improvement.**

### **Customer Service Level 2 (CSL2) messaging – do not travel and alternative arrangements**

The wording around alternative transport arrangements could have been bolder and more precise. Whether intentional or otherwise, the messages did not jump out as a clear “do not travel” appeal. Even the phrase “ticket acceptance” is an industry internal phrase – what does it actually mean to people? One passenger said in their feedback *“More regular updates on twitter, more information with regards to alternative transport, i.e. bus travel passengers were able to use”*. We could not see any core message providing:

- Clarity that if you are trying to get to/from X, Y, Z do not attempt to travel by train – it remained implied at best
- Links to sources of information about which bus to catch instead – e.g. to the bus company website or [www.traveline-cymru.info](http://www.traveline-cymru.info)
- Words to the effect “catch any bus to get to your destination – if the driver won’t accept your train ticket as valid, pay for the journey, keep the ticket and we’ll refund your bus fare”

### **Recommendation 4**

- i. That ATW is explicit when it means “do not travel”**
- ii. That you review the language and content of messages about using scheduled bus services as alternative transport. The review should look at, inter alia:**
  - **how to ‘signpost’ passengers to information about relevant bus services;**
  - **how to be clearer about what “ticket acceptance” means;**
  - **how to convey that if you have a valid train ticket but the bus driver makes you pay a fare there will be a no quibble refund; and**
  - **how to reassure passengers that you’ll treat them fairly if the Cardiff Bus ‘exact money only’ system catches them out**



## **Customer Service Level 2 (CSL2) messaging – use of Steady State status**

22/07 CSL2 declared 1321, Steady State activated 1322

23/07 CSL2 declared 1150, Steady State activated 1229

23/07 CSL2 declared 1452, Steady State activated 1636

All three incidents involved the Steady State status being activated in circumstances that appear to have been anything but steady state. Declaring Steady State removes the need for Control to be disciplined about issuing a message every 20 minutes containing the latest information – the measurement clock stops. Steady State is a concept designed for situations where a contingency timetable has been implemented and is operating without perturbation. These three incidents suggest that ATW Control may be in the habit of using Steady State inappropriately, with consequential impact on the flow of up-to-date information to frontline staff and passengers.

### **Recommendation 5**

**i. That ATW reviews its guidance to Controllers about use of Steady State to ensure that it is consistent with the spirit of what CSL2 is seeking to achieve**

**ii. That if Steady State is introduced, justification for it must be recorded at the time and decisions subject to periodic audit**

### **Station CIS**

It appears that because ATW was not processing cancellations and amendments in a timely fashion, the information passengers received via the CIS was poor. While it may have been the least worst option at the time, having to turn off the Cardiff Central CIS – or any CIS – at the very time passengers need it most is disastrous. One passenger said *“Provide what time the train will actually be arriving, don’t just turn off the live board”*. Another said *“The information boards need to be more helpful – it kept saying a train would be there in 3 minutes or 7 minutes and so on. If I had known there was such a major problem, I would’ve gone home sooner.”* Another commented *“There is nothing to say why the train is cancelled/when it’s going to be or the info saying when it’s going to be constantly changes and suddenly the train doesn’t turn up at the time and the next train changes up to 1st”*. Finally, *“I arrived at Ty Glas to see the info board merely said “severe disruption due to multiple signalling problems”. Whilst the board alerted me to a problem it gave me absolutely no information, advice or pointers on how to proceed. If I stayed put might I wait 10 minutes, 30 minutes, 1 hour or 6 hours. Other would be passengers had phoned National Rail but received no greater enlightenment.”* Processing cancellations and alterations in a timely way is at the heart of this, but passenger feedback also highlights the need to present a strategic overview of what is going on – that is, context in which passengers can process the other information being presented. At times on 22 and 23 something like this may have been appropriate to display at all affected stations: *“Do not attempt to travel. Major signalling failure. Use local buses – train tickets will be valid”*. If current systems cannot do that, how can they be improved?



### **Recommendation 6**

**That ATW considers how CIS can convey a ‘strategic overview’ to passengers arriving at stations – including ‘country end’ stations – in addition to detail about individual trains.**

### **ATW website homepage**

The high impact ‘masthead’ message was not deployed to the ATW homepage on either day, nor was the PIDD ‘ticker’ message used.

### **Recommendation 7**

**That ATW considers mandating use of a high impact message on the homepage in specific circumstances, with the need to tell passengers to travel by alternative means being one.**

### **National Rail Enquiries**

The NRE products, in particular the desktop website, mobile website, App and call centres have a major role to play in helping passengers understand what is going on during disruption. NRE have provided screenshots of the disruption messages showing on their website for 22 and 23 July. While we feel that the NRCC could have been more questioning of the information being provided via Tyrell, it is clear that ATW’s poor CSL2 messaging did not make it easy for NRE to provide good information. For example, on 22/07 when ATW had suspended services at Network Rail’s request because of separate problems at Cardiff Queen Street and Caerphilly, NRE reiterated the vague, inaccurate generalisation in ATW’s core message about delays of up to 60 minutes. One passenger said *“because the train cancellations (NOT DELAYS let’s get that straight) were handled so badly ...”* There was no mention of the numerous cancellations. There was no mention that the line was completely closed. It was never clear that there were signalling problems at two separate locations. References to Stagecoach South Wales as an alternative come across as something you may like to consider, whereas in reality it was the *only* option. As with other information sources, passengers were not guided to information about bus alternatives (although on 23/07 NRE did have a link to the Cardiff Bus website). At the 5 September meeting it was acknowledged that there had been little liaison with the NRCC, despite it being a key partner in helping ATW’s passengers understand what was happening.

### **Recommendation 8**

**That active liaison between ATW and the NRCC becomes a mandatory part of ATW’s CSL2 process with the objective that:**

- **The NRCC has full understanding of the incident**
- **There is regular discussion throughout an incident about the most useful message for passengers at any given time**



### **Unstaffed stations**

One thing that is apparent from the passenger feedback, and is mentioned in your own review meeting “outcomes” document, is the lack of – or limited – staff presence at unstaffed stations significantly impacted by the disruption. This compromised your ability to provide advice based on the latest information, but also meant you could not counter the sense of abandonment, even betrayal, that some passengers clearly felt. It also meant your ability to provide water to those waiting for trains was limited (on this occasion the need was for water on a hot day, but at another time of year it could have been for hot drinks). Even at stations with staff, such as Cardiff Queen Street, it appears that more were needed – or perhaps those present needed a greater sense of authority and knowledge of what was going on.

### **Recommendation 9**

**i. That, in respect of the network in the Valleys and immediate vicinity of Cardiff, ATW looks at the practicality of deploying at least one member of staff – with suitable ‘presence’ – to each of the unstaffed stations affected by disruption of this severity**

**ii. That ATW considers the Passenger Focus recommendation from December 2010:**

*“That train companies draw up a “how we will look after passengers stranded at ....” plan for every station they operate. At some stations this might cover little more than the provision of refreshments by a retail outlet on that station, but we would encourage train companies to think laterally. If you have no staff at a station but people stranded, how can you get staff there? Is there a pub/takeaway/shop nearby that could supply refreshments/toilet facilities – and if so, who has the phone number and contact name? If you have passengers stranded at an isolated location, could the Police, BTP or county force, be asked to ‘look in’? Could volunteers (e.g. station adopters) help out? Could there be a dedicated telephone line for passengers to obtain advice specific to them?”*

### **Buses into Darwin**

We note the view that because ATW does not yet have Darwin CIS, and that because on this occasion buses were deployed on an ad hoc basis rather than to operate a specific timetable, it was not appropriate to input buses to Darwin. The former argument is concerning given that, while it may not yet drive your CIS, Darwin is the data source for thousands of your customers via Apps, websites, telephone call centres, alerting services etc. The latter argument is more understandable, but we note that CSL2 message 4 at 1546 on 23/07 stated that buses will run from Cardiff Central to Rhymney; we cannot see why these could not have been created in Darwin.

### **Recommendation 10**

**As an integral part of keeping Darwin accurate, ATW should consider adopting a default position that buses chartered to replace trains will be input to Darwin, unless there is strong justification for them not being, such justification to be recorded at the time.**



### **Who stands back, thinking and reviewing?**

On 5 September your team were very honest that a role does not currently exist during disruption the sole purpose of which is standing back, thinking and reviewing.

### **Recommendation 11**

**We reiterate a Passenger Focus recommendation from December 2010:**

***“that during all CSL2 disruption train companies monitor in real time what their website(s), the National Rail Enquiries disruption pages, live departure boards, email and text alerts etc. are saying to ensure that information is “useful”. This is probably best done by somebody not embroiled in the disruption, probably in a marketing, communications or customer service role. That is, somebody who can sit to one side and think “is this useful to our customers?” – and intervene if necessary.”***

### **CIS disruption mode**

At the meeting on 5 September, we heard about two challenges with CIS ‘disruption mode’ at Cardiff Central. First, that all the trains unaffected by disruption on the Valleys had to be ‘rebuilt’ in the CIS and, second, that ‘disruption mode’ could not cope with trains being diverted via Ninian Park.

### **Recommendation 12**

**That CIS ‘disruption mode’ must be made fully fit for purpose for Cardiff Central as quickly as possible.**

### **Other observations**

#### **Honesty and openness in communication**

The feedback from passengers gave a strong sense of exasperation, of feeling taken for granted and even betrayal. One passenger appealed *“Tell us truthfully how long the train is going to be or (if it’s) cancelled so we can organise other ways of getting home if needed”*. It appears that it would have helped passengers if, as events unfolded over the two days, a better explanation had been given than “signalling problems”. Honesty that services were suspended as a safety precaution because Network Rail could not be certain that the signalling system was working properly could have helped. A more detailed website article could have gone into what an axle-counter is, what difficulties were being encountered with the new equipment etc. One of the recommendations resulting from our most recent PIDD research is worth highlighting here: **“In seeking to improve the quality of messages during disruption, consider how to more effectively ‘tell a story’, or ‘paint a picture’, of unfolding events. The objective should be to give passengers a continually-evolving sense of the activity going on to restore the**



**service. Understanding what is being done helps passengers practically and emotionally.”**

#### **Active, i.e. broadcast, tweeting**

We were struck that the broadcast tweets on 22/07 and 23/07 gave little sense of apology, regret or ‘feeling the pain’ of the customers – rather matter of fact and stilted, sticking to the agreed phraseology so unsuited to the open, honest approach required on Twitter. An element of good practice, however, was the effort made to elicit feedback from passengers. This appears to have resulted in a lot of rich qualitative feedback that may not otherwise have been received.

#### **Implementation of stranded trains policy**

We note that on 23/07 Network Rail did not allow one of the trains trapped between Cardiff Central and Cardiff Queen Street to move around 100 yards into the platform so passengers could get off, instead requiring the train to stand in the full glare of the sun for 30 minutes. While we have no insight to the safety implications of allowing this abnormal movement, it appears lucky that passengers did not self-evacuate and fortunate that the train was not stranded for longer. Does the apparent stand-off between ATW Control and signallers suggest that a rapid escalation procedure is needed where the comfort and welfare of passengers is concerned?

#### **Compensation**

There did not appear to be active promoting of compensation entitlement under the Passenger’s Charter – tweeting links to how to claim etc. – let alone an enhanced package for season ticket holders or for others experiencing lengthy, sub 60 minute delays. Actively seeking to give something back in recognition of the chaos is one way to counter the perception that the relationship between passenger and TOC is stacked in the latter’s favour.

#### **Use of the word ‘blocked’**

A minor point to conclude, but railways are blocked by trees, broken down trains, cars that have careered onto the track etc. The railway is not blocked because Network Rail won’t let you use it – it is closed or cannot be used!

I hope this is helpful. If any of the points made require clarification please ask. Likewise, if we can be of further help as you seek to address these issues.

Yours sincerely

**Guy Dangerfield**

Passenger Issues Manager