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By email

AS/2021/148

10 May 2021

Dear Andy and Jac

Hitachi safety checks

It has clearly been a very challenging weekend for railway staff and for passengers. Rightly, safety came first when the cracks were discovered. Passengers will want to see that lessons are learned from this episode about rolling stock design and inspection regimes. Is it clear who will lead such a learnings exercise?

It appears likely that passengers will be impacted for some time while the trains are fully repaired. I am therefore writing to ask you to ensure that the industry is focused on the following passenger issues:

1. Clarity of information about what is and isn't running

The affected train companies need to make it crystal clear what is cancelled and what is running:

- Amended timetables need to be showing in journey planners as early as possible.
- Where trains remain in journey planners but will not run, they must be marked as such. Showing the full timetable for the next day until late into the evening, uncaveated and complete with green ticks is not acceptable.
- By early afternoon each day there should be a broad description of the service that will run the following day showing on websites, ideally with a PDF of the intended timetable.
- Train companies must guard against saying nothing about the following day until they are completely clear about the timetable. That creates a vacuum of information just when passengers need to make decisions.
- In the absence of a comprehensive, automated system, ticket retailers – including train companies – must be proactive at getting in touch with passengers who have booked on trains that will not run.

A number of these points highlight the need for ongoing commitment to initiatives being progressed through work package one of the Smarter Information, Smarter Journeys programme.

2. Clarity of information about refunds

This feels better than on previous occasions of major disruption, but it could be better still. In particular, we encourage affected train companies to be crystal clear:

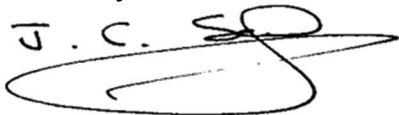
- That refunds are available if a passenger cannot or chooses not to travel, although rebooking is an option for those who want it. There is a tendency to have a somewhat complicated message about rebooking and then talk about refunds (see Appendix A). We think it should be the other way round.
- That passengers heeding “do not travel” advice, but their train still runs, are entitled to a refund. This is currently a grey area in Passenger Charters and creates uncertainty for passengers.

3. Managing crowding and being honest that social distancing may not be possible

Affected train companies need to manage the crowding implications of reduced timetables and shorter trains as best they can. Where possible, trains should be drafted in from other operators and recently withdrawn trains returned to service. This will be increasingly important as lockdowns continue to be eased. Where the number of passengers travelling is likely to make social distancing difficult or impossible, train companies should be honest about it (see Appendix B) – allowing passengers to make an informed decision about whether to travel.

I should be grateful for your assurance that RDG will work with affected members to achieve the best possible outcome for passengers and do let me know if we can help in the coming weeks.

Yours sincerely

A. J. C. 

Anthony Smith
Chief Executive

cc Peter Wilkinson, Department for Transport
Mark Phillips, Rail Safety and Standards Board
Ian Prosser, Office of Rail and Road

Appendix A

Extra from Great Western Railway website, 10 May 2021

Customers with tickets for long distance services are advised not to travel on Monday 10 May. Tickets dated for travel between Saturday 08 May and Sunday 16 May, can instead be used on any alternative day between Monday 10 May and Sunday 16 May inclusive. If you choose to travel on an alternative day, please travel as close to the time of your original ticket as possible, and we recommend you make a reservation. If you no longer wish to travel, we will provide fee-free refunds. Click here to [find out more about claiming a refund](#).

Appendix B

Extra from Hull Trains website, 10 May 2021

Important – We are pleased to confirm that following thorough checks by Hitachi on the Hull Trains Fleet of Class 800 series trains, services will now resume as normal. Due to the disruption we expect our services to be extremely busy and we cannot guarantee that social distancing guidelines will be adhered to, please wear a face covering. **Refunds** will be provided for Saturday morning’s services.