

Anthony Smith
Chief Executive
Transport Focus

By Email:

20th May 2021

Dear Anthony,

Thank you for your letter dated 10th May in relation to the Hitachi trains issue, which affected customers last week. RDG worked very closely with operators to ensure that customers had timely, accurate and clear information throughout the disruption which we agree is paramount importance. You may also have been aware that Robert Nisbet, RDG's Director, Nations and Regions, did a media round which focused on signposting customers to the information available, to make as many people as aware as possible of the need to check before they travelled.

An early deliverable of the Smarter Information Programme, on which you are sighted, has been the redefinition of the role of the National Rail Communications Centre (NRCC) to focus on the quality and consistency of information provided by the industry. The weekly audit that has been developed in conjunction with operators, Network Rail, Transport Focus & ORR has seen a steady improvement in the quality & consistency of information provided to customers.

In light of the issue with the Hitachi fleet issue, we have used the flexibility afforded to us by the weekly audit process, to adapt it to capture and monitor all the pertinent points in your letter and in some instances go further some additional metrics such as PSVAR plans. Given the time criticality of the information and the fluidity of the operations picture, we have reviewed the results on a daily basis and shared the results with operators, Transport Focus & ORR. That audit has been supplemented with daily calls with the Customer Information Group to share best practice and to advise colleagues of the latest information.

The audits that have been carried out have focussed not only on the operators directly affected by the fleet issues, but also those who have had a knock-on impact, as they have carried additional customers, to ensure we have a consistent industry view for the customer. The results of the audit are positive across all metrics, with all at green and information being updated daily by operators and the NRCC.

We recognise that customers will have different preferences in how they wish to receive the information. To that end we have worked across the industry to provide consistent information across a range of mediums like; websites, social media, direct emails, screens at stations and making sure our frontline teams and contact centre staff have been fully briefed. We have seen around a 30% uplift in calls to our contact centre, and therefore made additional staff available to ensure calls are answered promptly.

I am pleased you highlighted the planned work under work package one of the smarter information programme which will make a significant difference to customers. Other work packages currently going through funding will also make a significant difference for similar incidents; for example, extending the emergency timetable horizon in Darwin. We would welcome your continued engagement on this programme and your support of business cases will help to deliver these initiatives, which will enable the significant and sustained improvement in customer information that we all want.

The daily audits and support calls will remain in place until deemed no longer necessary, and we will continue to work alongside Dan Taylor (who has been extremely helpful) to ensure Transport Focus are engaged in the process and kept abreast of the latest information.

Happy to discuss any of the above, as ever.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jacqueline Starr".

Jacqueline Starr
Chief Executive