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By email

AS/2021/151

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Dear Jac

Hitachi service disruption

Thank you for your letter dated 20 May 2021 and for asking the National Rail Communications Centre to check on the areas we raised. While full repairs may be many months away, it is good to see that the acute problems have subsided.

During the disruption, Transport Focus monitored the passenger information and challenged relevant train companies – including GWR, LNER and Transpennine Express – to improve it.

Although our primary purpose was to improve the information for passengers seeking to travel in the immediate future, we identified generic issues applicable to any significant disruption. We encourage the industry to address the following:

1. Can the journey planner be trusted or not?

- Make it clear, within journey planners and elsewhere on TOC websites, on which dates journey planners are correct and which they are not. It is as important to be clear about what can be trusted as what cannot.
- If the timetable for the following day will go into journey planners overnight, be clear about that. Help passengers understand when to check back.

2. What is and isn't running?

- Give a clear, concise textual overview of what is and isn't running – don't make passengers piece it together from journey planners or live departure boards.
- By mid-afternoon each day provide a textual overview of what is expected to run the following day, together with – depending on the scale of change from the full timetable – a PDF of the timetable or a list of planned cancellations. Valuable in any case, this is particularly important where journey planners will only be updated overnight.
- If your operation is largely unaffected, don't forget to tell people that – they may be wondering; they may believe disruption is worse than it is.

3. Passenger Assist

- Don't require passengers who have made Passenger Assist bookings to contact you to find out what is going on: be proactive and get in touch with them.

4. Alternative services

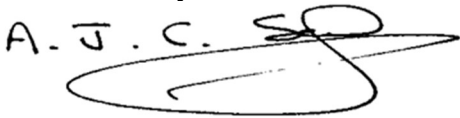
- If ticket acceptance is arranged with operators that are also experiencing the same problems, that needs to be made clear to passengers – don't allow people to gain the impression that alternatives are unaffected
- When providing information about alternative travel options, don't talk only about the name of the other train company – explain the routes as well. Not all passengers know how which companies run where
- Be clear that if fewer trains are running they and/or any replacement buses are likely to be busy. This is important at any time, but particularly so at present if it means social distancing will not be possible.

5. Check it makes sense

- Keep checking that what is on websites makes sense and is expressed as clearly as it could be. Ask somebody other than the author to read it and provide feedback.

I should be grateful if you would check that a solution to each of these issues is covered in the ongoing Smarter Information, Smarter Journeys programme? If not, could they be added?

Yours sincerely



Anthony Smith
Chief Executive

cc Peter Wilkinson, Department for Transport