

Subject: Rail replacement buses - monitoring performance

Dear Jac, Jacqui

I hope you are both well.

The difficulties train operators are having sourcing sufficient buses (or perhaps more accurately bus drivers) to deliver intended rail replacement links is causing questions to be asked about the monitoring of delivery in this area. We have seen reports of successive bus departures being cancelled leaving passengers stranded for excessive periods mid journey.

As you know, rail replacement buses for planned engineering works are generally published through the Network Rail System Operator CIF feed as would be a train, but it isn't clear to us that data is available about the proportion of the intended bus trips that were actually delivered on the day – let alone about the punctuality of those buses.

We have three concerns, best summarised as:

- Concern that significant consumer detriment may be occurring, but because it isn't measured it is invisible and as a result there will be less pressure on the industry to improve
- Concern that without data on bus cancellations and late running, automated delay repay systems reject legitimate claims
- Concern about the principle of transparency in delivery of the product

It would be helpful to understand whether TOCs routinely report the proportion of bus schedules in the CIF which a. ran and b. ran on time and c. ran with the intended capacity (e.g. three buses planned for the 1100, only one ran) and to whom it is reported. If that information isn't currently available, I would welcome an early discussion about how it can be collected and reported in future as a matter of course?

While on this subject, I'll take the opportunity to reprise a long-standing Transport Focus aspiration. Namely, that the industry finds a way to incorporate real time running information about the buses it hires for planned rail replacement into Darwin. Valuable all round, this would be particularly so for passengers waiting at intermediate stations who currently have to hope that the bus is running as advertised, let alone that it is on time. Could the Smarter Information Smarter Journeys programme be charged with tackling this?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards

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Hi Guy,

We have looked into this and the questions you've raised, liaising with TOCs to understand the issues you outline.

In response to your questions about whether TOCs routinely report the proportion of bus schedules in the CIF which a. ran and b. ran on time and c. ran - the honest and simple answer to this is no. There are several reasons for this:

1. There's no performance implications if a bus doesn't run or is late, so it can't be reported as such in TRUST
2. In reality, a significant majority of TOCs don't have any real-time tracking of buses, therefore the control teams wouldn't necessarily know that a bus was cancelled / delayed. Coaches are not always fitted with tracking equipment, so it is impossible to track.
3. Even if operators do have real-time data, to enter this into Darwin would be a manual process – we're not aware of any TOC having real-time bus reporting data that flows into their CIS and therefore Darwin
4. Bus cancellations can be added into Darwin through the CIS and Darwin Workstation (and to a limited extent, Tyrell - but not all TOCs) and this is occasionally done, but this is more often used when a bus company tells the operator at short notice that whole sections of work can't be covered rather than individual cancellations. Likewise bus delays can be entered manually but it's very rare for this to be done.

In terms of how we tackle this issue going forwards, as you know we have recently spent the last 18 months doing a lot of work to plan version 2 of the Smarter Information, Smarter Journeys programme and defining the next set of deliverables. This issue re tracking of replacement buses wasn't on our radar either through the customer research that we conducted with Transport Focus, or from the significant number of stakeholder feedback sessions that we ran - so we don't have it on our roadmap to address. We can add it to our backlog of items but have only recently (start of April) kickstarted 4 new Work Packages, so is unlikely we'd be able to start work on this in the immediate future. Moreover we'd need some support in justifying to stakeholders that this customer pain point should be prioritised ahead of the other things we have planned, and identify a funding source.

Happy to discuss further.

Thanks
Adam

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