

Steve Helfet
Deputy Director, Railway Operations
Office of Rail and Road
23 Stephenson Street
BIRMINGHAM
B2 4BH

Transport Focus, Albany House,
Ground floor west, 94-98 Petty France
London SW1H 9EA

07711 319760
guy.dangerfield@transportfocus.org.uk
www.transportfocus.org.uk

12 July 2024

Dear Steve

Late notice pre-cancellations

Thank you for your letter dated 17 June 2024. The question of pre-cancellations is important for passengers – it has practical implications and impacts on trust in the railway. I know from our discussions that you agree that this is broader than just *late notice* pre-cancellations. We have set out our response under three headings: passenger information; metric construction; and transparency.

Passenger information

This may be a statement of the obvious, but it is important to keep firmly in mind that passengers need to know which trains will run and which trains will not as early as possible. That way they can plan around the railway's travails. Accurate, honest information builds trust among passengers. Being able to see which trains will *not* run is important: passengers should not have to work out which trains are missing that would normally operate.

Therefore, it feels to us that trains in the Long Term Plan (LTP) that are removed from the timetable at *any* point prior to the day of operation should show in journey planning systems and on station customer information systems as "cancelled" unless removed because of:

- alterations to the LTP published through the Short Term Planning (STP) process not less than X weeks* before operation (for example, planned engineering work and bank holiday alterations including Christmas Day and Boxing Day)
- introduction of a temporary timetable that is significantly different to the LTP and which is widely advertised no later than Y time** on the day preceding its operation (for example, a snow or high winds timetable, a strike timetable containing significantly fewer trains than normal, a temporary timetable in response to a Dawlish or Nuneham type situation)

* There is a case for X being 12 (or the number of weeks in the Informed Traveller recovery plan if fewer), but a strict 12 could have unintended detrimental consequences for clarity of information where an engineering timetable was finalised just a few days late. We therefore suggest eight weeks, but happy to discuss.

** Y should ideally be 06:00, with the revised service widely advertised for the whole of the preceding day. However, this may have unintended detrimental consequences for clarity of information if, for instance, the 'call' to operate a snow timetable the following day was not made until, say, 09:00. We therefore suggest Y is 12 noon, but happy to discuss.

Metric construction

From a passenger perspective it is vital that the industry understands the gap between the number of trains it should have operated and the number it did, identifiable by cause, and irrespective of how far in advance a train was removed from the timetable. It is that gap which passengers regard as the *real* cancellation level, not just those made on the day. With a true understanding of that gap the industry can focus on addressing what is preventing it delivering the full timetable – its promise to passengers (and governments specifying and funding service levels). Understanding the problem will allow it to be fixed, leading to a better service to passengers. An example: if the industry does not have a metric allowing it to show the true number of trains that did not run because of flood risk, how can it make the case to do something about flood risk?

Therefore, we feel that a metric is required that will show the number of trains included in the LTP for each day of each Rail Industry Period (RIP) that are not included in the eventual ‘plan of the day’. Trains would not count if removed for planned engineering work and bank holidays including Christmas Day and Boxing Day etc., provided the alterations were put through STP in accordance with Informed Traveller timescales. Whether 22:00 remains appropriate as the cut off between advance cancellations and on the day cancellations should be considered. Perhaps it should be the 12 noon suggested above for publication of temporary, significantly different timetables for the following day?

For avoidance of doubt, although recorded to facilitate analysis/production of management information, it should be immaterial which party requested that a train be removed from the timetable, immaterial how far in advance it was removed and immaterial which mechanism is used to remove it (for example, STP, P-code, Darwin including Darwin Extended Horizons). The methodology and its application should be consistent across the network. We envisage a means being needed to prevent inappropriate short-term changes to the LTP.

Transparency

Alongside generating data for the industry itself to truly understand how much of its product it is not producing, being transparent with that information is key to building trust among passengers, stakeholders and funders. Nagging distrust that the numbers tell the true picture is not helpful. The energy must go instead into doing something about improving the numbers. ORR’s proposal for shadow running between new and old methodologies is helpful in navigating the transition.

We feel that Network Rail should report on its website the number of trains removed from the LTP other than because of engineering work and bank holidays etc., broken down by the principal reasons trains did not operate, who requested removal from the timetable and how far in advance of operation the change was made. The previous RIP, the rolling annual average and a means to see trends over time is important. The data should be disaggregated by Network Rail Region and Route, by train company and by principal service groups within train companies. The latter should be replicated on each train operator’s website. The new metric and cancellations on the day data should always be presented alongside each other, so presenting a complete rather than partial view of cancellations.

Yours sincerely



Guy Dangerfield
Head of strategy and intelligence