

**Marcus Clements**  
Head of Consumer Policy  
Directorate of Economics, Markets & Strategy  
Office of Rail and Road



Rebecca Preece  
Integrated Transport and Accessibility Manager  
West Midlands Trains

18 February 2021

Dear Rebecca,

**Compliance with Condition 5 (Accessible Travel Policy) of your Station Licence and GB Statement of National Regulatory Provisions: Passenger**

Thank you for your response to our letter dated 19 August 2020 in respect of West Midlands Trains' licence and its performance in relation to its obligations under section A1 (**Booking and providing assistance to passengers**) of the Accessible Travel Policy (ATP).

Your response has helped us to understand in more depth the background to the challenges West Midland Trains experienced across 2019-20. We note the difficulties resulting from the implementation of your May 2019 timetable change and industrial relations issues in the autumn of the same year were cited as the primary reasons for the difficulties in booked assistance provision.

You informed us these challenges have now been overcome and set out a number of measures that would be put into place over 2020-21 to improve the reliability of your assistance service. These include strengthening collaborative working with other operators; introducing new governance structures; and holding quarterly Stakeholder Equality Group meetings. In addition, we note you are continuing to develop your training strategy and making changes to your booking services.

We welcome these measures. We will continue to discuss them further with you alongside our ongoing discussions on your delivery of staff disability equality training at our planned quarterly meetings, in order to understand how these measures will improve the reliability of WMT performance in the future. We will also continue to monitor your performance in this area through your routine performance data (Core Data) submissions and our own passenger surveys.

Please note that this letter and your response will be published on our website.



Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marcus Clements". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

**Marcus Clements**

Denise Brown  
Senior Executive, Consumer Policy  
25 Cabot Square  
London  
E14 4QZ

**BY EMAIL**

10 September 2020

Dear Denise,

Thank you for highlighting the findings of your survey into our delivery of passenger assistance during the year 19/20.

It is particularly disappointing that only 70% of surveyed passengers received all aspects of the assistance they had booked. It is equally disappointing that, even within the limited survey sample of 189 passengers, almost one in five passengers (17%) failed to receive any aspect of the assistance they had booked.

Our commitment to deliver assistance to passengers is outlined in our Accessible Travel Policy (ATP), and we appreciate the importance of delivering on this to enable all passengers to access our services confidently.

During the period of the survey, West Midlands Trains faced a number of operational challenges, which will have likely impacted on the experience of passengers requiring assistance. Following the implementation of our May 2019 timetable change, we faced a number of difficulties with our train service performance. Subsequent industrial relations issues in the Autumn of 2019 led to extensive staffing challenges across our network.

One of these challenges would have put tremendous strain on our business. Combined, these difficulties affected our ability to deliver the level of service our passengers expect in a number of areas, including passenger assistance.

We are pleased to report those challenges have now largely been overcome, but we are fully aware further action is needed to continue to improve the quality and reliability of our passenger assistance programme.

There are a number of actions that we are undertaking at an overall level to improve accessibility across our network:

- **Accessibility training to all staff**

We submitted our accessibility training strategy to the ORR in July 2020. In this submission we have outlined how we intend to deliver accessibility training to all our staff by July 2021, in line with the specified ORR learning outcomes. Training material is currently in development and includes the lived-experiences and feedback from members of our Stakeholder Equality Group (SEG). This input is an important part of giving our staff the insight required to provide the quality of passenger

Operated by West Midlands Trains

assistance expected, and to understand the importance of this for many of our passengers. As this training is rolled out, it will help improve engagement of staff in the passenger assistance process through increased awareness of its importance.

- **Improving and maintaining our call centre experience for booking assistance**

We are continuing to work closely with our contact centre provider to maintain a high level of service for passengers booking assistance with us. We will continue to monitor the delivery of this service to ensure that bookings are handled efficiently and correctly, and that we receive the relevant reports in a timely manner.

- **Full support to the introduction of Transreport**

We continue to offer our full support to the implementation of Transreport across the rail industry, which will pave the way for improved delivery of passenger assistance in the future.

- **Working with other operators**

From the data provided, there is some evidence that there have been partial failures at locations where we operate the station, but the failure to provide assistance has been on train. This aspect of the assistance may have been delivered by other operators on our network. We will continue to work with Network Rail, Avanti West Coast, Cross Country and Chiltern, as the primary partners of shared routes, to look at how assistance fails in these circumstances. We have some recent good collaborative working with Avanti and Cross Country over major lift refurbishments at Watford and Tamworth, which temporarily made those stations inaccessible.

- **Internal governance and forums**

As the new Transreport system for managing passenger assistance bookings is introduced across West Midlands Trains and the wider rail industry, we will be bringing together the areas of our business that interact with the delivery of passenger assistance to ensure this is delivered as effectively as possible. We are looking to introduce a new internal governance structure and forum to assist with implementation of the Transreport system, which will interact directly with our quarterly Stakeholder Equality Group (SEG) meetings.

- **Stakeholder Equality Group**

We will be continuing to hold quarterly SEG meetings in order to consult on improvements we can make to improve our accessibility agenda, as well as gaining feedback on individual experiences of using our services.

As passenger numbers, and therefore the number of assists being booked continues to increase, I appreciate the importance of ensuring we provide the best service possible to our passengers. We will continue to monitor the feedback on the provision of assistance to identify improvements and ensure our services remain accessible to all.

Yours Sincerely,

**Francis Thomas**

Head of Corporate Affairs

**Marcus Clements**  
Head of Consumer Policy  
Directorate of Economics, Markets & Strategy  
Office of Rail and Road



Rebecca Preece  
Integrated Transport and Accessibility Manager  
West Midlands Trains

19 August 2020

Dear Rebecca,

## **Compliance with Condition 5 (Accessible Travel Policy) of your Station Licence and GB Statement of National Regulatory Provisions: Passenger**

I refer to Condition 5 of West Midlands Trains' licence and its performance in relation to its obligations under section A1 (**Booking and providing assistance to passengers**) of the Accessible Travel Policy (ATP).

In its ATP West Midlands Trains has committed to providing assistance when booked in advance through Passenger Assist, at any station during the hours that trains are scheduled to serve that station. Our data shows that West Midlands Trains received 48,809 requests for booked assistance in 2019/20.

As you will be aware, the Office of Rail and Road conducts ongoing research into the experience of booked assistance users who rely on the service to make their journeys. Our latest survey results for 2019/20 (rail periods 1-13) show that at the stations managed by West Midlands Trains only 70% of passengers surveyed<sup>1</sup> received all aspects of the assistance they had booked in advance. We note that almost one in five (17%) of those West Midlands Trains passengers surveyed did not receive any aspect of the assistance they had booked.

These findings indicate that the reliability of West Midlands Trains' booked assistance provision is currently falling short of what we, and your passengers, expect. It is important that passengers receive the service they have booked. Failure to do so can have an adverse impact on passengers' confidence and willingness to travel in future.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on a sample of 189 West Midlands Trains passengers surveyed by Breaking Blue.

**Next steps**

I shall be grateful if you will explain the reasons for the shortfall in performance together with the steps you intend to take to improve the reliability of the booked assistance provided to passengers.

I look forward to receiving your reply by **Friday 11 September 2020**.

Please send your response to: [Denise.Brown@orr.gov.uk](mailto:Denise.Brown@orr.gov.uk)

This letter and your reply will be published on our website.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. Clements', written in a cursive style.

**Marcus Clements**