

Charlie Woodhead
Accessibility & Integrated Travel Manager
LNER

Jacqui Russell
Head of Consumer Policy
Strategy, Policy and Reform
ORR

By email

22nd April 2024

Dear Jacqui,

Update on implementation of LNER's trial introduction of an alternative process for communicating between stations on assistance provision

I am writing to you, as requested in your letter dated 24th November 2023, to provide an update on the trial that has been undertaken by LNER on an alternative to the handover protocol between stations where we are responsible for the delivery of Passenger Assist. I thank you again for the opportunity to provide you and your team with an update on this on a call on 8th April 2024 and hope this letter provides further reassurance to you.

Since approval of our proposal, we have been utilising the Passenger Assist Staff App by Transreport (henceforth referred to as the PA Staff app) that has been in place at LNER since May 2023 as an alternative to the handover protocol in specific circumstances. As a reminder and confirmation, those circumstances are:

Where assistance is provided by LNER at the station a customer is both boarding and alighting any train service, and where the assistance is considered pre-booked and unchanged, we will not call ahead by the traditional use of a telephone call and will instead solely 'on-board' the customer on the PA Staff app.

We would continue to follow the existing handover protocol in all other circumstances, including:

- Assistance is only provided by LNER at **either** the origin or destination of the journey
- Assistance is on an LNER train but not involving LNER staff as utilising other operators' stations
- The assistance is considered Turn-up-and-Go (TUAG) and not booked in advance
- The assistance was booked but has changed either due to the customer's request/plans or due to disruption

We additionally proposed that while we would call ahead TUAG bookings, the call would consist of confirming whether the destination station had seen the request on their system, and only provide all the details in the rare eventuality that the destination station had not. This, as such, maintained the robust process of the phone call but reduced the length of time taken on the call.

Success of the trial

We have been using this alternative to the handover protocol between December 2023 and April 2024 and so far, during this time, we have not had a single assistance failure or complaint reported for a journey which was booked in advance and between two stations where we deliver assistance. We have seen a very reliable service delivered as a result of this and have found that not only has not calling ahead not increased the risk or actual events of assistance failure at all, but it has actually decreased these and made the management of assistance significantly more practical and, as such, reliable.

The primary metric that we use to ensure the reliability of the app being used is our 'actioned' data from the PA Staff app. This tells us what percentage of bookings were actioned and which were not. Actioned, in this case, means that the status of a booking ended up as one of the following:

- Completed: at destination, the booking was updated to show all assistance was completed

- On board (departure): this means the customer was departing that particular station and at the end of their journey remained 'on board' which tells us that the boarding station actioned the booking correctly in the app but the destination station did not. This is likely due to the destination station not being an LNER station so we can be confident the LNER member of staff at the departing station has done what is required of them
- Incomplete: The customer was marked 'incomplete' at some point in the journey meaning they either did not make themselves known, there was disruption, or some other factor resulted in them not travelling as planned
- Cancelled: The customer cancelled their booking in advance of travel and as such no requirement on our teams for any action to be taken in the app

For any booking not actioned, these would fall into the categories of:

- Pending: No action in the app was taken in relation to this booking at any point by any member of staff on the ground. This is often due to it being a duplicate or the customer not travelling, however staff are reminded that in those circumstances they should be marking the request as 'incomplete' to avoid us sending resources to a train when they are not required
- On board (arrival): This means the assist related to arriving at the particular station and that whilst the departure station actioned the booking correctly to say the customer was 'on board' the arrival station did not mark the request as completed. In reality, this is often due to forgetting to do so due to being distracted, having multiple assists close together, or other reasons. We identify any patterns with these and work with stations to reduce them as, while it is unlikely each one of these means assistance was not provided, it means we have no audit trail to prove otherwise.

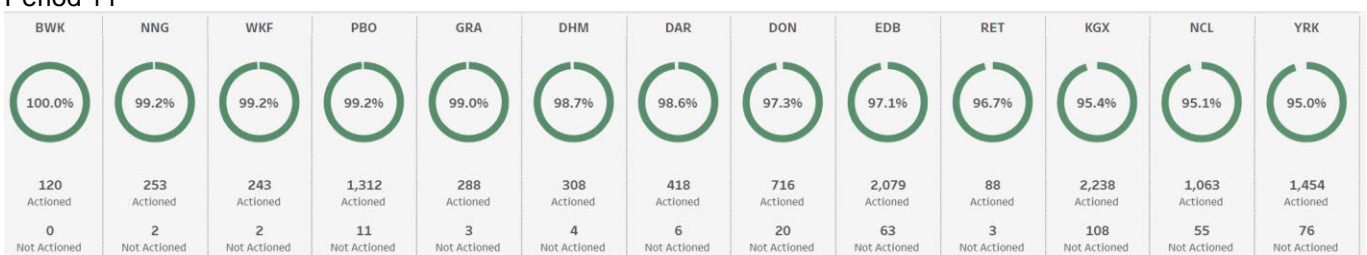
In relation to this, the data below shows Periods 10 to 13 and their scores by station for % actioned:

Period 10

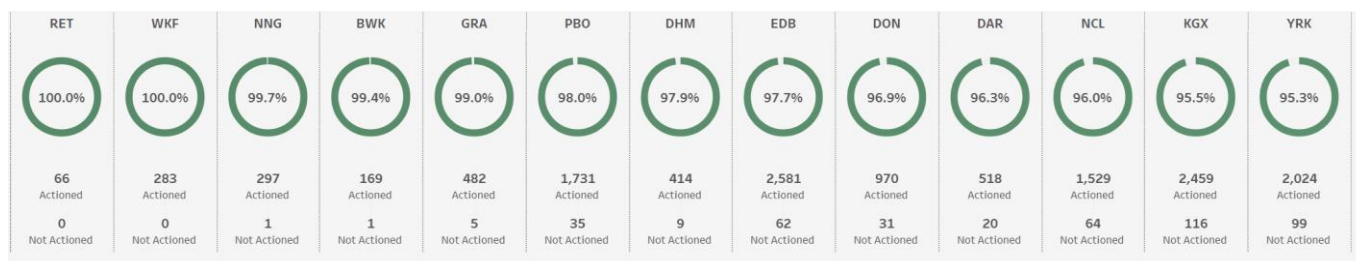


For period 10, we note a notable drop in actioned requests at London Kings Cross and York particularly. Unfortunately, during this period (Christmas), on the 21st December and 27th December – two of our busiest days of the year – we experienced major service disruption network wide due to severe weather conditions and as such advised customers not to travel and to abandon their journeys. This significantly impacted the number of people marked as 'on board' onto trains which then were cancelled and customers subsequently abandoned their journeys – some trains ending up with over 15-20 assists on them. As such, there are a lot of unactioned assists due to abandoned journeys and our findings do not suggest this was a result of assistance failures.

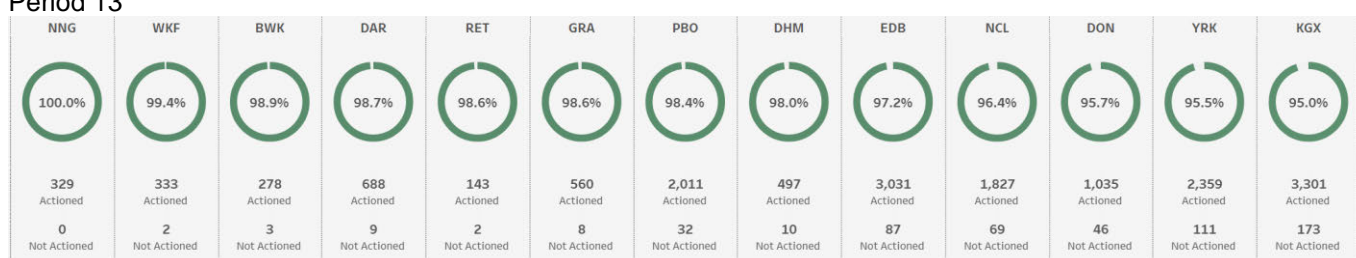
Period 11



Period 12



Period 13



We are confident that these numbers reflect our belief that the trial has been very successful and has improved the reliability of assistance. Overall, through the trial period we have seen 0 complaints/failed assistance reports and high 90s in our percentage actioned scores consistently maintained which we believe is testament to the confidence our people have in the app and equally the reliability of the service it delivers.

We have also pulled together information of any issues reported by other TOCs of failures to call ahead from LNER stations to non-LNER stations and these are summarised below:

Month	From	To	Issue	Note
Dec	DON	SVG	GTR report no call ahead	Investigated and addressed locally. Happened during major disruption and was human error
Dec	NCL	SVG	GTR report no call ahead	As above
Jan	PBO	SNO	GTR report no call ahead	Peterborough investigated and confident a call was made but could not evidence at time
Feb	KGX	SVG	GTR report no call ahead	Issue identified that takes too long for control room to be informed to call. New process introduced recently that member of staff assisting calls ahead
Feb	KGX	SVG	GTR report no call ahead	As above
Feb	KGX	SVG	GTR report no call ahead	As above
Feb	PBO	SNO	GTR report no call ahead	Peterborough investigated and confident a call was made but could not evidence at time
Mar	PBO	ECR	GTR report PBO called but staff member forgot whether coach 6 or coach 7	We do not believe this error had a huge impact but PBO reminded member of staff on importance of having all information available to hand over during the phone call
Apr	PBO	HUN	GTR report no call ahead	Currently under investigation

Following the investigations into these examples we are confident that they are usually isolated incidents. Following incidents at Peterborough and at London Kings Cross for short journeys, both stations have introduced local processes that the assistance provider calls ahead themselves if the journey is considered a short journey (this is specified locally) rather than a phone call being made by the Information Controller – this avoids delay in communication. We are confident we have learned from these incidents and as such they are less likely to reoccur and in fact are actually likely reduced as a result of the focus being entirely on these phone calls rather than also a high volume of LNER to LNER calls.

When approached for general feedback at the end of the trial period CrossCountry did highlight some concerns about LNER's method of operation - namely marking a customer as 'onboard' using the app after the train has already departed. LNER adopts this way of working, as do a number of other TOCs, to ensure that only one communication needs to take place to guarantee that all information required by the ORR as part of the handover protocol can be relayed, including the customer's seat location. This is the case whether the handover occurs via the app or a phone call. Whilst we take this feedback onboard we do not believe that the change to our process has created any increased risk. Unfortunately, we were unable to investigate the specific examples provided due to the length of time that has elapsed since they occurred, but believe that the new process did not have any additional impact on these cases. We remain committed to investigating any reports of communication issues or assistance failures received from other TOCs and working with them to mitigate any perceived risks.

Lessons learned

We have found that by reducing the overall number of phone calls that are expected to be made by a station, the attitude towards the importance of phone calls has changed. Previously, due to the impossible volumes we were finding that some stations were more likely to be defensive due to the unreasonableness they felt of the demands. Now that we have reduced the quantity of phone calls required significantly, we have found that investigations into failure to call ahead where it was required have been done faster and taken more seriously. As such, we believe that this change has significantly helped us improve some culture challenges relating to the handover protocol and made the workload of our colleagues easier which has in turn helped us get the buy-in we need on improving reliability.

While we have had no assistance failures that fall within the new approach to handover, we did see one assistance failure happen as a result of a failure to call ahead between two LNER stations for a TUAG assistance request. Following an investigation, the feedback was that the destination station had reduced staffing due to the time of night and thus did not have time to check their phone between the train departing the origin and arriving at destination, which equated to about 45 minutes, due to carrying out other duties. The outcome of the investigation was that for TUAG bookings, it is important that the phone call still takes place. While this was a breach of the process, it also highlighted to us that we are not yet in a position to consider changing the handover process for TUAG bookings due to this increased risk where we are not guaranteeing at least 2 hours' notice to the stations involved.

Next steps

Based on our experiences throughout this trial period we believe that our existing proposal – and the specific option that ORR approved – is a successful replacement for the handover protocol for our type of operation and should remain in situ. While we had originally intended to use this opportunity to consider whether we should extend the approach to TUAG bookings, we believe that our findings have highlighted that this would not be a good decision as we do not have the level of confidence that we have with booked journeys.

We do think there are opportunities to add more stations to this way of working – such as Leeds, for example, where a large proportion of assists to/from our stations travel to. Leeds, however, are not in a position where the app is being used to the same extent as at LNER stations and, as such, we will continue to work with Northern on how we get to a point where adding them to this way of working would be a viable proposal for us to submit.

Conclusion

Following the success and reliability of this approach and the lack of a single assistance failure of a booked assist caused by communication during this time, we believe we have proved the case for this to be a permanent way of working for our business and that reversing this approach would have significant impacts on the staff culture we have worked hard to improve and undo the work we have done to improve reliability.

As such, LNER's proposal is that we continue with the current process indefinitely and that this process is reviewed as part of the annual review of our ATP each year. Additionally, between now and the next ATP review in 2025, LNER is willing to immediately self-report any reported failed assistance to the ORR that is found to have been due

to a communication issue and fall within the handover method that does not involve a telephone call, thus giving ORR assurance that you have sight of what is happening.

Furthermore, due to the increased confidence we have in the delivery, we are proposing that we amend our approach to redress for TUAG assistance also. We believe that if we board a customer onto a train, we have accepted responsibility for that journey and, as such, do not feel it is fair that they are not entitled to compensation if their assistance fails at destination. As such, we propose to extend the redress for failed assistance to also include TUAG journeys – however, only where the assistance fails at the destination, not at origin.

We hope you will agree with us that this approach is the best way forwards for our customers and for our colleagues and we look forward to developing this further.

We look forward to hearing from you.
Yours Sincerely,



Charlie Woodhead
Accessibility and Integrated Travel Manager
LNER

Steve Wilson
Head of Stations
LNER