



ORR Accessible Travel Stakeholder Forum

2 October 2024

Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees

Name	Organisation
1 Matt Westlake	Office of Rail and Road (ORR, Chair)
2 Claire Clark	Office of Rail and Road (ORR)
3 Stewart Hill	Office of Rail and Road (ORR)
4 Jacqui Russell	Office of Rail and Road (ORR)
5 Will Sanderson	Office of Rail and Road (ORR)
6 Stephen Brookes	Disability Rights UK
7 Niki Glazier	Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC)
8 Simon Watkins	Mobility Access Committee for Scotland (MACS)
9 Sharlene Wright	National Autism Society
10 Erik Matthies	Royal National Institute of Blind People
11 Megan Barnett	Transport for All
12 Emma Vogelmann	Transport for All

Agenda

Item no.	Time	Topic
1	10:30-10:35	Welcome, introductions and apologies
2	10:35-10:55	Handover protocol project
3	10:55-11:15	Reliability of help points
4	11:15-11:20	Refreshment break
5	11:20-11:40	Assistance benchmarking
6	11:40-11:45	Update on issues with specific operators
7	11:50-12:00	Roundtable update and AOB

Meeting summary

The Chair began by welcoming the Forum members, including a new attendee representing the National Autistic Society, and provided an overview of the Forum's function and the agenda for the meeting. There were no actions from the previous meeting to update on.

Handover protocol project

The ORR senior manager introduced the first item on a project looking at the operation of the handover protocol at five busy stations. An overview was provided of the requirement on operators to use the handover protocol when providing assistance, as well as of the work that preceded it – this included ORR's 2023 audit of passenger assistance that identified the handover protocol as a risk area, particularly at busy stations at busy times.

The project is intended to identify useful case studies, good practice, challenges and opportunities, and potential non-compliance. A report will be published and actively disseminated. An information request will be issued to operators of the five stations to understand various aspects of their adherence to the protocol, including their governance structures, processes, training and quality assurance.

Development of the project's scope is still underway, and the Forum were invited to offer their thoughts on this. Much of the feedback was about how the five stations would be chosen. While it was acknowledged that there was value in including a positive example so that good practice could be identified, it was felt that highlighting poor examples would be more useful in achieving positive results. The senior manager confirmed that geographical and operator spread, passenger and assist volumes, and assistance performance were all being considered in selecting the five stations. The issue of resourcing was highlighted by multiple members, which the senior manager confirmed would be considered fully as part of the study.

An update on the project will be provided at the next meeting of the Forum.

Reliability of help points

The ORR senior manager introduced this item, looking at the reliability of help points – specifically the reliability of their and service provision for passengers. Station operator responses to an information request, site visits and discussions with individual operators informed the emerging findings and recommendations, which were shared with the Forum ahead of the report's publication. The key findings covered the availability of help points, their reliability and usage, and the varied offer to passengers, and these have shaped a range of recommendations that were also shared.

Members fed back concern around operator reliance on freephone numbers where staff or help points were not available to passengers, highlighting that disabled passengers were less likely to have a mobile phone or be willing to use it. Other feedback included the need for passengers to be made aware of what help points are for, noting that a lack of awareness and frequency variation in their design, leads to them not being used. While the policy around whether stations are required to have a help point or not is outside this project's scope, the senior manager confirmed that issues around awareness and variation in design would be considered during the report's drafting.

It was confirmed that the report would be published during the autumn of 2024.

Assistance benchmarking

The Chair provided an update on this project ahead of formal consultation, having engaged with the Forum previously on its scope.

The Chair presented potential performance categories, including headline descriptors, that would be applied to operators' performance. Members had comments on the clarity

and usefulness of the draft category names in achieving what the framework was meant to, which the Chair confirmed would be considered before they were finalised.

The potential content of the framework was then shared, under the two main areas of 'delivery of assistance' and 'capability to improve in delivering assistance', as well as the approach to publishing scores, including whether there should be a single overall score or individual scores for each area or sub-area. The Chair sought the Forum's feedback on this matter, with members feeding back that simplifying the scoring would be more effective. Related to this, members felt that while some of the indicators would likely be easily understood by the public, others were more granular and behind-the-scenes in their nature and would be less public-friendly as a result.

Update on issues with specific operators

The Chair provided a brief update on ongoing engagement with two operators.

Firstly, around concerns about Northern Trains' delivery of assistance at its managed stations. ORR wrote to Northern Trains requesting submission of an improvement plan and engagement continues at both senior and working levels.

Secondly, the Chair updated on ORR's engagement with Eurostar around its submission of a revised Accessible Travel Policy that accurately reflected its approach to delivering wheelchair assistance at St Pancras, as well as the suitability of the approach itself. It was explained that, as this is considered a material change, we have been following our standard approvals process which includes consultation with statutory consultees (DPTAC, Transport Focus and London Travelwatch).

Roundtable update

Closing the session, the Chair provided members with the opportunity to update the rest of the Forum, however there were no organisational updates.

AOB

No further business needed addressing and the meeting closed at 12:05. The next meeting will be held in March/April 2025, and members will shortly be contacted to confirm availability.

END