

Papworth Trust response to Office of Road and Rail consultation on Draft guidance on complaints handling procedures for licence holders

Respondent details and basis for response

We are responding on behalf of Papworth Trust, Bernard Sunley Centre, Papworth Everard, Cambridge, CB23 3RG.

This response is compiled by Paul Comer, Policy and Campaigns officer who leads on our transport policy work.

Papworth Trust is a disability charity, whose aim is for disabled people to have equality, choice and independence. We help over 20,000 people every year through a wide range of services including employment support, leisure, homes and care.

Our response is shaped by the responses of 799 disabled rail users who responded to a survey we conducted as part of producing our April 2015 report ***Improving rail travel for disabled passengers in Britain*** accessible at this link <http://www.papworthtrust.org.uk/campaigns/making-train-travel-more-accessible>

Response background and general comments

Papworth Trust welcomes ORR's decision to consult on guidance on complaints handling procedures for licence holders.

One of the key findings of our *'Improving Rail'* report was that disabled rail users experiences are not consistent and vary depending on which stations and operators they use. The variability of services came through strongly in responses from disabled people, and is an important reason why many disabled people feel less confident in using trains.

Two of our key recommendations in our report highlight the need for government, regulators and industry to improve the quality of published information on journeys taken by disabled people, in order that greater transparency of the differences between operators can help highlight good practice and encourage improvement for those not performing as well as others. These recommendations are:

2. Include key performance indicators for train companies around accessibility in franchise agreements
3. Require monitoring data on journeys involving disabled people to be collected and published

Whilst we did not specifically mention better data on Complaints Handling Procedures, we believe they are a key component to the greater transparency we believe the industry needs in this area.

Often when a disabled passengers journey goes awry, it is a combination of factors such as absent staffing, delayed trains, wrong equipment or untrained staff that creates the problem. Resolving these problems requires a joined up response often by several operators that the current system does not usually address. We would

encourage complex complaints to have a resolution system that can take all these different components into account in a timely manner.

Comments on stakeholder feedback

We agree with stakeholder feedback comments in your covering letter.

We agree that operators should have the ability to respond outside of the formal process, as long as a formal process sits in reserve in case it is not resolved satisfactorily.

Similarly, we agree that a greater focus on outcomes is much needed.

We think these two issues are particularly important for disabled passengers who often do not have the support they need to 'fix' a problem that has occurred during a journey. For example we have had cases cited to us of people not being disembarked at a station where they booked assistance, and instead being disembarked further down the line and left to their own devices to get back to their intended disembarkation point. We would welcome more flexible responses where the train operators could respond in real time, take ownership of resolving the problem through to conclusion, and get the person to their intended destination.

Core Standard 1: Feedback mechanisms and response

3.25 We strongly support the need for independent verification of complaints handling from the point of view of the customer and would welcome the creation of such an opt-in system allowing the rail operator to check directly with complainants on their satisfaction.

3.29 We strongly support guidance for handling multiple operator complaints for the reasons cited above.

Core Standard 2: Structures, people, and processes

Staff training was highlighted by our survey respondents as a key issue to the delivery of smooth and dependable service to disabled passengers, with 57% percent of respondents citing staff training as key to delivering them the support they needed to use the trains. Many respondents who had the choice of different service operators highlighted their preference of one operator over another because their experiences with staff from one operator were consistently poor or consistently good.

3.57 We would like to see a commitment by operators to making sure awareness training on disability is included in training for their complaints handling staff as well as their frontline staff. Our survey reported many instances where staff response to disabled rail users either on site at stations, through booking services or at complaints stage showed a low level of awareness from staff about how to respectfully treat obviously disabled passengers, or lack of sensitivity especially when dealing with customers with invisible disabilities such as learning difficulties or autism.

3.60 We believe that all complaints involving a rail user who reports themselves as having a disability should be recorded as such. This would allow rail operators to understand any issues specific to disabled users and remedy them, compare complaint types between disabled users and general users to see if any problems are more prevalent amongst disabled user, and to monitor specifically what improvement different interventions to improve service have over time.

Core standard 3: Organisational culture

3.68-70 We strongly believe that complaints relating to disabled customers are a key indicator of an organisations overall complaints culture. We know from organisations like the Business Disability Forum that organisations who focus on solving complaints made by disabled customers in general have fewer complaints overall than other organisations. We believe this is because if an organisation learns how to correct problems for some of their most challenging customers, it creates many spin off benefits in their organisation that benefit other customers too.

We would like to see complaints relating to self-reported disabled customers a specified reporting criteria at board level in order that these flagship complaints can benefit both disabled customers, other customers and the organisation most.

ORR's monitoring approach

4.1 We strongly support the power of transparent complaints data to help drive improvement amongst operators and support any moves to make this data publically available. We would strongly urge, for the reasons highlighted above, the need for all complaints to record any aspect of self-reported user disability to allow maximum knowledge to be shared across the industry and by individual operators.

4.3 We also strongly support the notion of an independent audit to make sure customers are not underreporting satisfaction with complaint resolution. Again we think it important that complaints from disabled people can be separated out and compared to those of general users to identify specific areas for improvement.

Response submitted to:

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