From: Dave Addey, Managing Director, Agant Ltd
Sent: 20 June 2011 21:31
To: Grenfell, Abigail
Subject: Amending licences to give passengers the information they need to plan and make journeys

Dear Abigail,

As a current licensee of real-time journey planning and live departure services, I wanted to respond briefly to the ORR's consultation regarding the provision of passenger information.

To give some background: I am the MD of Agant Ltd., developers of the UK Train Times app for iPhone. Our app uses real-time data feeds (provided and hosted by National Rail Enquiries) to provide live train information to rail passengers across the UK.

Our app was initially launched in March 2009.
You can find out more about the app on our web site:
http://www.agant.com/app.php?appID=nre . Amongst other awards, it recently won the RNIB Accessible App of the Month award for making passenger information available to blind and partially-sighted passengers via Apple's VoiceOver screen reader technology.

Our app is essentially a consumer of the real-time data provided by the rail industry. As such, we don't provide any of the source data for these feeds - rather, we take the amalgamated data feeds and provide a third-party interface to this information, to help passengers plan their journeys, and deal with disruptions when they occur. We're not from a rail industry background - we're a small, independent app development company, and are not affiliated to any rail industry company or body.

From our own experience, the licensing of this data for end-user use in our app has been a fair and painless process. We originally approached National Rail Enquiries in August 2008 with a prototype of our app, and they were willing to set up a non-exclusive license for our app to use their existing real-time data feeds. (There are now several other paid apps on the Apple App Store from other app developers serving a similar purpose, as well as several free apps from individual TOCs and ticket vendors such as thetrainline.)

As I say, we do not provide raw source data for passenger information systems. However, as consumers of this data, we have occasionally encountered problems with the quality of the data in the feeds, particularly during times of severe disruption. Ironically, this is when our app is at its most useful, to enable users to work around disruptions and manage their own journey alternatives.

Being able to do so empowers the user to control their own journey, and reduces the demand on platform, station and call centre staff for NRE / TOCs / Network Rail.

On several occasions, the data in these feeds has contained duplicate services (showing cancellations in one case but not another), or inaccurate / misleading data for particular services. The NRE feeds themselves have always operated correctly; however, the source industry data in the feeds has on several occasions been found wanting. This has been the case particularly during extreme weather conditions such as those seen in early 2010.

The impact of these inaccuracies is twofold. Firstly, and most importantly, it leads to frustration and inconvenience for travellers. Many passengers have come to rely on our app for their everyday travel, and when the data is unreliable, this leads to missed or unnecessary journeys. Secondly, the bad feeling engendered by this inaccurate data leads to a bad impression of our app, resulting in negative reviews despite our reliance on the rail industry for the quality of the data.

As a result, I would support any initiative to improve the reliability and accuracy of this data, particularly in times of disruption. As I say, I am not from the rail industry, and so am not familiar with the current licensing conditions for TOCs and other providers of this data. As such, I do not feel qualified to comment on the specific details as to how these licenses should be modified. However, I am in favour of improvement of the data.

I would also encourage the ORR to take into account the ways in which third parties such as ourselves already assist with the provision of passenger information in times of disruption, to empower passengers and reduce the impact on rail staff. Any improvements in data integrity should certainly be made available to third party consumers of that data such as ourselves, to ensure we can continue our important role in helping passengers with their journeys.

Yours sincerely,

Dave Addey.

Dave Addey
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