



Tom Steinberg, Director

Sunday, 19 June 2011

Dear Abigail,

I am the director of mySociety, a not-for-profit organisation that runs websites like TheyWorkForYou.com and FixMyStreet.com. We are well known for using public data in unanticipated ways to produce public-good services on the internet.

I am writing to give you our feedback on the ORR's proposed license amendments relating to passenger information. We are a keen re-user of public transport information, having used huge amounts for our Mapumental service, and the soon to be launched FixMyTransport.com . We are exactly the kind of organisation that who's existence and activities were not foreseen when the original arrangements for provision of rail information were put in place.

First, we strongly endorse the ORR's decision to use operator licenses as a lever through which to improve information availability to passengers. A public transport operator that does not make information available as the 21st century public and economy requires it is no more fit to run a service than one that cannot maintain basic safety standards.

Second, we believe that such changes are required because the current regime of information provision has not adapted fully to the reality of the internet era, and so passengers are correspondingly being denied information services that would benefit them. In particular, the rail industry has not yet fully understood that passengers want information through the channels of their choosing, and that means services not exclusively provided by operators or Network Rail. This has been well understood in the airline industry for some time, but the narrow range of legitimate ways of obtaining rail information is now clearly lagging behind consumer expectations.

Third, we believe that poor information provision of the kind that ORR is concerned about will never be fully exposed so long as the re-use of train information is restricted through onerous licensing or pricing conditions, or through simply refusal to supply information at all. Third party services that keep a close eye on accuracy and reliability of transport information and services have been stifled: there is no UK rail equivalent of the excellent US based <http://FlyOnTime.us> . Consequently the ORR itself, and other bodies such as Passenger Focus must collect and analyse rail travel information in a relatively inelegant, expensive and antiquated fashion. In other words, rail watchdogs should themselves become some of the main beneficiaries of more liberal rail information licensing regimes.

Fourth, we do agree that there is a lack of clear accountability in the current framework for providing information to passengers. When third party innovators wish to make use of rail information, the key decision makers are hard to find, and the buck is often passed around. This needs to end – there needs to be greater accountability about who is actually preventing rail information from being made more widely available, so that their arguments for doing so can be fully evaluated.

Lastly, we request an additional clause to be included within the proposed license amendments. We would like the ORR to mandate that Network Rail and Operators make passenger timetabling information and real time running information freely available for unlimited re-use by third parties, as a condition of their licenses. We request this because we believe that in both times of normal and emergency operation, a healthy ecology of third party groups re-using and adding value to rail information will:

- A) Create economic value through the creation of new businesses, and improved efficiencies in transport use.
- B) Give passengers a wider range of good quality services to help them make use of the rail system
- C) Help watchdog organisations to do their job better by making it easier to obtain and analyse timetable and real time running information.

We hope you find this feedback useful.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Steinberg, Director mySociety