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To: Abigail Grenfell, ORR
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Subject: Passenger information consultation

I wrote a small program that vastly improved the live departure boards web facility.[1] This illustrates that there is plenty of potential for better use and presentation of the data.

Limiting access to ESSENTIAL data to via what are essentially on-line shops created on the basis of steering people in the direction of spending money or waiting for streams of adverts is as inappropriate as having platform information displays plagued by adverts and having one display for each operator.

The objectives should be

- 1 Open data : Free to use with acknowledgement of source.
- 2 Accessible data : Speedy computer-readable interfaces operating to a publicly controlled standard.

Accuracy and usability of data are a big concern. Data collection methods and algorithms need to be reviewed from the point of view of passenger use. At the moment passenger information is tacked-on to a train describer system as an afterthought. The simplicity of the algorithms for things like "Train starts here - On time" when the stock is far away in some unknown location is misleading.

Attempting to create a coherent and accurate picture from an automated system when there is _widescale_ disruption (as opposed to 'serious') is pretty much impossible as plans get changed. Therefore it may be much better to change the system and remember that humans are quite good at dealing with these situations. So at some stage the 'message' becomes "The automated system is not to be relied on at the moment. At <station> we are sending about 1 train an hour in each direction."

Being forced by public ridicule at misleading automated systems might get the system improved for the staff as well. I have been in the office of a big station trying to fins out what's happening when an arriving train is notified one minute before it arrives - even though it must have been dispatched from the last place and travelling for at least ten minutes. Perhaps an overall fitness for purpose(s) review should be carried out.

[1] <http://vulpeculox.net/rail/index.htm>

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