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Consultation Response

## **ORR consultation on Real Time Train Information**

Final

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. **pteg** represents the six Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) in England which, between them, serve more than eleven million people in Tyne and Wear ('Nexus'), West Yorkshire ('Metro'), South Yorkshire, Greater Manchester (TfGM), Merseyside ('Merseytravel') and the West Midlands ('Centro'). Leicester City Council, Nottingham City Council, Transport for London (TfL) and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) are associate members of **pteg**, though this response does not represent their views.
- 1.2. PTEs are the main strategic transport planning bodies outside London. They plan, procure, and promote public transport in some of Britain's largest city regions, with the aim of providing integrated public transport networks accessible to all. As part of their statutory duties, PTEs are required to provide impartial multi-modal transport information. They have also led the way nationally in the development of real time bus information and have been at the forefront of the development of multi-modal and multi-operator ticketing products for several decades.
- 1.3. PTEs are currently seeking a greater role in the delivery of local and regional rail services in the West Midlands and the North of England, and discussions are currently underway between the PTEs and the DfT on this issue.
- 1.4. **pteg** welcomes the chance to input into the ORR's real time train information consultation.

## 2. Background

- 2.1. Information has always been an important component of the public transport offering. Yet, the demand for travel information seems to have grown exponentially over the past couple of decades. In part, this reflects technological changes, with the internet, mobile telecommunications and GPS tracking making travel information increasingly accessible, convenient and affordable. But it is also apparent that customer preferences have evolved to reflect supply side developments.
- 2.2. We believe that these technological and behavioural changes create significant opportunities both for public transport market growth and for more efficient use of the existing infrastructure. This is because improved passenger information can act to reduce uncertainty, a characteristic of transport networks that we know passengers particularly dislike. Passengers are thought to value lateness and journey time variability at around three times scheduled in-vehicle time<sup>1</sup>. Not surprisingly, research in the Netherlands<sup>2</sup> has shown real time delay information to be the most sought-after form of information at station and on-board services whereas it was the second most sought-after form of pre-trip information. Overall, at least 95% of respondents expressed a desire for real time delay information at some point during their journey.
- 2.3. Tackling disruption directly is a challenging and expensive task in a context of rising demand and constrained capacity. In contrast, by reducing uncertainty and the weight passengers place on unreliability<sup>3</sup>, real time information can have a similar effect at a much lower cost.

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<sup>1</sup> See recommendations from Passenger Demand Forecasting Handbook 5.1 Update.

<sup>2</sup> Grottenhuis, J-W, Wiegman, B W and Rietveld, P (2006), The desired quality of integrated multimodal travel information in public transport: customer needs for time and effort savings.

<sup>3</sup> For example, if passengers know that they will be informed of suitable alternatives when disruption takes place or is anticipated to take place.

- 2.4. At the same time, we would point out that the rail network doesn't exist in isolation. A significant proportion of rail trips rely on other modes either at the access or egress end. Emerging media allow a multitude of fragmented but complementary data streams to be integrated into an information service tailored to the requirements of individual users and therefore overcome existing barriers between providers.
- 2.5. Despite the huge potential offered by real time travel information (RTTI), we feel that NRE's overly onerous and bureaucratic licensing arrangements are preventing this from being fully realised. In our view, treating RTTI as a source of short term revenue, rather than as a part of the wider marketing of rail and multi-modal transport networks, could lead to a loss of much greater revenue in the long term. In the same way that we don't expect passengers to pay for advertising, we find it bizarre that train operating companies choose to hinder the development of travel information tools through high charges and complicated licensing arrangements. It should be in the rail industry's interest, not to mention society at large, to radically simplify the access arrangements to real time travel information.

### 3. PTEG response

#### **Question 1: We are looking for stakeholder comments on NRE's proposed changes to its Code and where changes have not been made, comments on NRE's reasoning**

- 3.1. On the licence application process, the updated code still maintains a requirement for submitting a new application for each permitted use. In our view, there should be at most a single access licence to cover use of the Darwin service by a single entity for similar purposes across multiple platforms.
- 3.2. In terms of the charging structure, NRE currently requires a payment of between £1 and £1.50 for each download of a given app. As we argue in the introduction to our response, we believe that charging for access to Real Time Train Information is akin to asking passengers to pay for advertising and acts to stymie a market that the rail industry should instead be trying to stimulate.
- 3.3. Putting that argument to one side, however, we also consider the level of the charge to be excessive especially when NRE data is being used as only one of several datasets (nearly all of which free) incorporated into the kind of multi-modal travel applications which PTEs offer. It does not seem reasonable to expect users of multi-modal apps, the majority of whom are not regular rail users, to contribute a flat charge to NRE's bottom line. We cannot understand why train operating companies, who stand to gain the most from the wider circulation of Rail Real Time Information through increased patronage, would wish to inhibit PTEs from relaying this information to passengers.
- 3.4. We refer you to the Centro response with respect to access to push port services.

#### **Question 2: We are looking for stakeholder comments on the extent to which Network Rail's data feed represents a viable alternative to Darwin and the uses that these feeds can be put to.**

- 3.5. Network Rail feeds do not contain enough information to generate journey based predictions and are therefore unsuitable for the provision of RTTI. This information is also offered on a contention based first come first served basis and so there is the risk of the feed not being available when required due to possible overloading of the service.

- 3.6. While it would be possible to generate a competing station based information system similar to the Darwin Live Departure Boards this would require extensive development effort at a cost of £50,000 to £75,000, based on information supplied by Centro. We consider that this represents a significant barrier to entry, especially for small scale developers. Should train operating companies choose to continue with the same licensing and charging arrangements we would argue that the existence of this barrier to entry and the presumably negligible marginal cost of dealing with additional information requests would justify a more heavy-handed regulatory approach on the part of the ORR.

**Question 3: We are interested to hear consultees' views on the evidence that we present in Chapter 5 on the number of new licences and apps., and on any reasons why they consider this growth might overstate the health of this market. In particular we welcome stakeholder views on: (a) The medium-term sustainability (to the extent that this is possible to predict in a fast-moving technology market) of the relatively large number of apps that are currently on the market, including on the feasibility of paid and ad-funded or free-to-download apps coexisting; and (b) The likelihood of a significantly better range of applications and functionality being made available under a more open data standard.**

- 3.7. Because the NRE's code of conduct requires a separate application for each permitted use, the number of licences issued doesn't necessarily reflect the state or health of the market.
- 3.8. Our view is that NRE's current terms and charging structure has limited the development of innovative rail real time and multimodal real time applications, in particular when compared with the state of the market for bus based applications. In our view all public transport data feeds should be accessible on the basis of a similar licensing regime to encourage innovation at a multimodal transport level. This would increase the usefulness and the marketability of apps and result in market growth.

**Question 4: We ask consultees for views on whether an open data approach, if adopted, would lead to change in the market for RTTI products and services and if so: (a) what this change might look like; and (b) whether it would be desirable.**

- 3.9. As we argue in the background section, we believe that it is in the interest of the rail industry, and more generally society at large, to adopt an open data approach to RTTI.
- 3.10. This of course needs to be balanced against consumers' expectation regarding the quality and impartiality of information. We would point out that the provision of integrated and impartial transport information remains a key statutory responsibility of Integrated Transport Authorities (to which PTEs are accountable) under the Transport Act 2000. We therefore accept that some degree of licensing and quality control needs to be undertaken. However, this could be a much more streamlined and efficient process, for example, based on a sample of ex-post checks, rather than NRE's protracted system.
- 3.11. Given our statutory duties and governing principles, we would also argue that there is a strong case for radically simplifying licensing arrangements for PTEs.