

Annette Egginton

Head of Competition and Consumer Policy
Directorate of Railway Markets & Economics

Email: annette.egginton@orr.gsi.gov.uk

23 September 2016

Phil Wittingham
Managing Director
Virgin Trains

Dear Phil

Approval of West Coast Trains Limited (Trading as Virgin Trains) Complaints Handling Procedure (Condition 6 of the Station Licence and GB Passenger Statement of National Regulatory Conditions)

Thank you for submitting your draft Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) for approval. A copy of your revised CHP is attached to this letter, and will be published on our website along with a copy of this letter.

I confirm that we have reviewed your CHP against the 2015 “*Guidance on complaints handling procedures for licence holders*” (the guidance), and can confirm that your revised CHP meets the requirements of Condition 6 of your station licence and GB Passenger Statement of National Regulatory Conditions (SNRP). We also sought views on your draft CHP from Transport Focus and London TravelWatch.

We welcome your aim to respond to passenger complaints within 10 working days, which we believe will be positive for passengers.

You have confirmed that where a complaint has not been resolved and your internal procedures have been exhausted, you will provide information on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) to the complainant, in accordance with the Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes (Competent Authorities and Information) Regulations 2015. This information will usually be highlighted to complainants in the second substantive response, when details of Transport Focus and London TravelWatch are also given. We understand that you will identify an approved ADR provider (in this case Ombudsman Services, trading as the Consumer Ombudsman) but that you do not plan to make use of this provider and instead complainants will be advised to contact the existing passenger bodies. Where a complainant does contact Ombudsman Services you have an arrangement in place whereby they will be referred to the relevant passenger body.

This approach appears to discharge the information requirements in the Regulations, however, we will be engaging with ATOC and the Department for Transport as to the application of the ADR regulations more generally and this may result in the need to revisit policies in due course. You will continue to be engaged with developing thinking through your representation at ATOC.



You have confirmed that you will be making changes to your website in order to meet the minimum requirements of the guidance. You have confirmed that you will provide a static link to your CHP with information on your complaints handling service standards, such as response times, on the same page as your online complaints form. You have committed to completing this work upon final approval of your CHP. Please confirm when this has been completed, which should be within one week of the date of this letter.

In the case of Virgin Trains West Coast, the relevant passenger bodies are Transport Focus and London TravelWatch. In line with the requirements of the guidance, licence holders must establish an appeals handling protocol where the passenger bodies require this. We understand that these protocols have now been finalised and we expect licence holders to abide by them in their handling of appeals.

Yours sincerely,

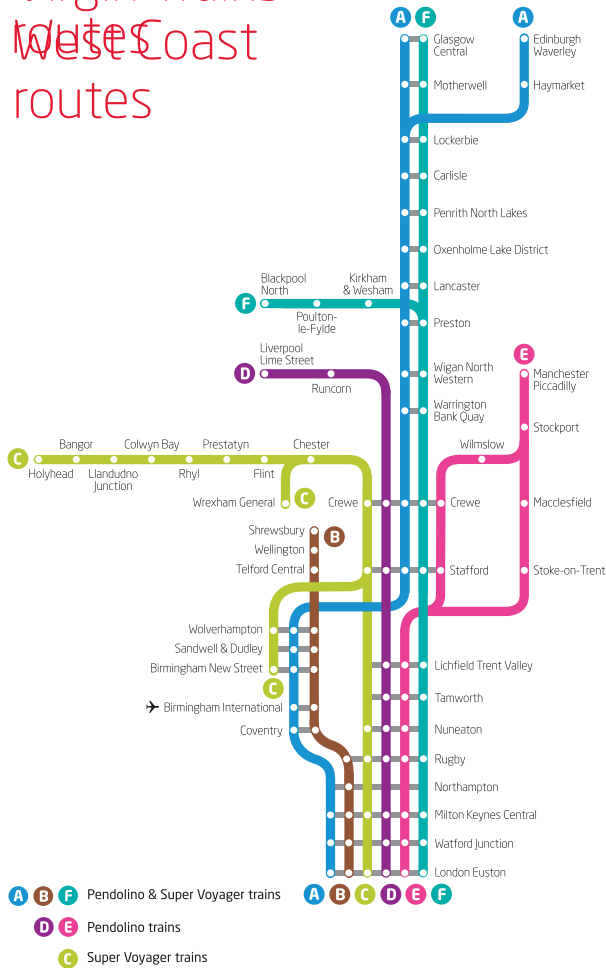


Annette Egginton



Book your train tickets at virgintrains.com

Virgin Trains West Coast routes



Making a complaint

How we will deal with your complaint

Valid from September 2016



VirginTrains @VirginTrains

Contents

	Page
1. Welcome	2
2. Talk to us	3
3. How we will deal with your complaint	4
4. Response times	6
5. Dealing with frivolous or vexatious complaints	6
6. Compensation	7
7. Confidentiality	7
8. Claims for loss, property damage or personal injury	7

1. Welcome

Welcome to Virgin Trains. Your feedback is invaluable in helping us to improve our services in the future. If you're not happy in any way, we'll take your comments or complaints very seriously and do everything we can to make things right.

We aim to resolve all complaints to your satisfaction, quickly and effectively, without the need for the involvement of third parties. However, the policy also gives further information on independent bodies you can contact if you are unhappy with the response we have provided.



2. Talk to us

Our Staff

The first thing to do if you are unhappy with our service is tell one of our people. They are all trained to help and will try, where possible, to resolve your complaint immediately. This may include involving their supervisor or manager.

If your complaint cannot be resolved on the spot we will pass it on to our Customer Relations department.

Our Customer Relations team

Our Customer Relations team is there to help you and there are several ways to get in touch:

Email: customer.relations@virgintrains.co.uk
Live chat: virgintrains.com/livechat
Post: Virgin Trains
Freepost RRAE-UJZZ-ESUR,
Po Box 713,
Birmingham B5 4HH
Telephone: 03331 031 031

Calls from 03 numbers can be accessed from mobiles or landlines without incurring premium rate charges.

Opening times: 0830 to 1800 Mondays to Fridays, and 0900 to 1600 on Saturdays. (closed 25/26 December, and hours may vary slightly over the Christmas and New Year period.

When you call us outside the above times, an automated message will confirm that the department is closed and advise of the above opening times.

When contacting the team, to help us respond to you promptly, make sure you tell us your name, provide us with contact details so we can respond to you, tell us the name of the station or time and date of the train service your complaint relates to and let us know as much detail as possible, including details of your train tickets.

Where your complaint relates to a service provided to us by one of our suppliers, we will handle it ourselves, liaising with the supplier in the process. If your complaint relates to the services of another train company, we will let you know who it needs to be referred to, and with your agreement pass it on to them.

Our website

The simplest way to get in touch with us is through our website, virgintrains.com. From here you can complete an online form to tell us about anything, good or bad, find answers for many questions about our services or download other information such as our Passenger's Charter.

Through social media

Our Social Media team is here around the clock and will be happy to discuss your complaint, answer your queries or receive your feedback through Facebook or Twitter. Come and speak to the team at:

 Twitter: @VirginTrains

 Facebook: facebook.com/virgintrains

We understand that some people have specific access requirements, or whose first language is not English, and may therefore have difficulties communicating with us. We handle these cases sensitively and give our responses in an appropriate format. We make provisions for customers who are visually or hearing impaired such as through our Text Relay service or by providing materials in alternative formats such as large print. We are happy to process complaints or feedback from guardians, carers or support workers who are acting on your behalf, as long as we have your written permission.

3. How we will deal with your complaint

Making a complaint directly to a member of staff

If your complaint is made in person to one of our team they will try and resolve it on the spot, involving their supervisor or manager if appropriate.

If your complaint cannot be resolved, it will be passed to our Customer Relations team. We have cards containing their contact details for use in these circumstances.

Making a complaint to the Customer Relations team

The team will undertake a full and fair investigation into your complaint before responding to you. If you have provided a contact phone number, they may call you to resolve your complaint over the phone or to obtain further information is needed to investigate your complaint robustly.

If your complaint concerns one of our people, while we will confirm if an internal investigation has commenced by their line manager, we will not confirm what action has been taken against the individual, in view of Data Protection considerations.

If you are unhappy with our response and contact us about it, the case will be escalated within the Customer Relations team. The complaint will be reviewed again, as will the initial response we sent, and we will respond to you within 20 working days. Within this response the letter will explain the role of Transport Focus and London Travelwatch and provide their contact details. These are independent organisations set up to protect the interests of rail users.

Contact details for these organisations are as follows:

Transport Focus

Freepost RTEH-XAGE-BYKZ
PO Box 4257
Southend on Sea, SS1 9PZ

Tel: 0300 123 2350

Web: transportfocus.org.uk

Email: advice@transportfocus.org.uk

Twitter: @TransportFocus

For passengers whose journeys originate from either London Euston or Watford Junction, please contact:

London TravelWatch

169 Union Street
London, SE1 0LL

Tel: 020 31 76 2999

Fax: 020 31 76 5991

Web: londontravelwatch.org.uk

Email: enquiries@londontravelwatch.org.uk

In addition to the above, the Alternative Dispute Resolution for consumer disputes (Competent Authorities and information)

regulations 2015 requires us to advise you of an 'Alternative Dispute Resolution' organisation for your complaint. In our case this is The Consumer Ombudsman (consumer-ombudsman.org). However, as Transport Focus/London Travelwatch already provides a mediation service for customers in the rail industry, we do not make use of the ADR process, and correspondence to the Consumer Ombudsman will be redirected to Transport Focus/London Travelwatch.

4. Response times

If speaking to our people or contacting our Social Media team, we will try and resolve your complaint on the spot.

However, if you contact our Customer Relations team or have your complaint referred to them, you can usually expect to hear back within 10 working days.

Our stated target is to respond to 95% of correspondence within 20 working days. We will provide you with a reference number linked to your complaint to help you track it if you need to.

In busy periods, such as following a period of major disruption, our response times may increase. However, if this happens, we will put messages on our Customer Relations phone lines and in the email acknowledgements sent from Customer Relations to keep you informed.

5. Dealing with frivolous or vexatious complaints

If you believe we have not met our customer service standards, we understand that you may feel angry or upset. Whilst we respect the rights of our customers to express their views, we will not tolerate aggressive, threatening or abusive behaviour of any kind.

We reserve the right to terminate any correspondence or communication that we believe to be 'frivolous, vexatious or abusive'. In the first instance the case will be reviewed by our Head of Customer Relations. If he or she supports the decision to terminate further correspondence, we will then consult fully with the Office of Rail and Road and Transport Focus or London TravelWatch before we terminate any correspondence and inform you in writing of the reasons behind our decision. In this response we will also include contact details for Transport Focus and/or London TravelWatch.

6. Compensation

We will offer you compensation if appropriate, in line with our Passenger's Charter, and the National Rail Conditions of Travel. We will take account of other relevant factors when deciding on levels of compensation and use our discretion where appropriate. If you are entitled to compensation, or we deem it appropriate to offer you discretionary compensation, we will confirm this in our response to you.

For customers wishing to claim compensation because they were delayed by 30 minutes or more when travelling with us, please refer to the Delay Repay section of our website virgintrains.com or pick up a form from one of our stations.

7. Confidentiality

Your personal details, or details about your complaint, will not be shared with third parties unless we have your consent in writing, or it is necessary to fulfil our own obligations to Members of Parliament, the Department for Transport, other train operators, Transport Focus and/or London Travelwatch or the Office of Rail and Road. This includes other bodies carrying out statutory duties such as the police. We will fulfil our legal obligations in respect of the Data Protection Act (1998).

8. Claims for loss, property damage or personal injury

If you wish to make a claim against Virgin Trains for losses, property damage or personal injury, please contact our Customer Relations team who will either deal with your claim or pass it to insurance and claims handlers.

The rail industry has an arrangement called the Claims Allocation and Handling Agreement (CAHA). All train operating companies must comply with CAHA and your claim will be processed in accordance with this agreement. Under CAHA, compensation should be dealt with by the companies for their own customers. If some or all responsibility is allocated to another party, the insurance companies balance payments without involving the customer.



Complaints Handling Procedure

Valid from September 2016

Contents

1. Welcome
2. Complaint or feedback
3. Publicity
4. Monitoring and reporting
5. Training and development
6. Reviewing this policy



Welcome

Welcome to Virgin Trains. This Customer Complaints Handling Procedure explains how we differentiate between feedback and a complaint, our monitoring and reporting arrangements, how we use feedback and complaints to improve our services and how we develop our teams managing such contacts.

For details about how to submit a complaint and an explanation of that process, please refer to our policy document 'How we will deal with your complaint' which is available from all staffed stations our trains call at or from our website virgintrains.com.



Read our policy document 'How we will deal with your complaint'



Complaint or feedback

A complaint is defined as; "any expression of dissatisfaction by a customer or potential customer about service delivery by the company or its agents, and/or about company or industry policy". We classify any comments that meet this definition as a complaint.

Our Customer Relations team receive training on how to correctly log a complaint on our system and that includes how to separately classify a complaint and feedback. Both our Customer Relations and Social Media teams are trained to probe further when they receive negative feedback to help determine whether these are actually complaints.

All complaints and feedback are gratefully received and used to help improve our services. This policy document explains specifically how we process complaints.

Publicity

Customer information notices are displayed in each coach on Virgin trains to advise customers who experience a problem to contact our on board people who will always try to help 'on the spot'. The notices contain a Virgin Trains route network map and contact details of our Customer Relations team and of Transport Focus and London TravelWatch.

Our Route Timetable booklets contain advice on how to make comments and complaints, and also include details of Transport Focus and London TravelWatch.



Jump to details of
Transport Focus and
London TravelWatch



Monitoring and reporting

Monitoring

Calls and correspondence dealt with by our Customer Relations team are regularly monitored by team leaders within our contact centre on an ongoing basis. This is to ensure that all complaints are handled in a friendly and personal manner, that all points raised are suitably addressed and that appropriate compensation is awarded in a consistent way.

We carry out continuous surveys to assess customer satisfaction with the complaints procedure, and in particular the quality of our responses. The survey identifies the level of satisfaction with our response under the headings of promptness, clarity, helpfulness and fairness. Customers are asked to assess their reactions to the response given, their likelihood of making a future journey with Virgin Trains, and if they are willing to take part in a more detailed survey.

Reporting

We always welcome complaints and feedback from customers. Our Customer Relations team share the information with relevant managers and directors to help inform decisions made to make changes and improvements to our service. Managers can then also cascade key messages to their teams, specifically in relation to local issues so that our people are empowered to make the changes that will really benefit customers from local communities.



Complaints and queries, along with issues raised via Social Media and through our other feedback channels are brought together in our Customer Insight Steering group. From here the relevant senior leaders in the business define what issues need to be addressed and what approach we need to take to create the most impact for the customer. Our Customer Experience Strategy team use this information to tackle customer problems at the root cause as well as equipping our frontline teams with the tools to resolve individual issues on the spot where possible. We share local feedback regularly with our regional and route teams to ensure they are abreast of complaints and are able to act upon them. We equip our frontline managers with access to customer views gathered through our advocacy portal so that customer comments can be seen immediately by train and by station to ensure action can be taken to address any outstanding issues. We also work closely with suppliers and industry partners to drive down those complaints which we have a shared responsibility for.



Finally, every four weeks we submit a report or provide information to the Department for Transport, the Office of Rail and Road, Transport Focus and London Travelwatch that details such things as the quantum of complaints, complaint categories and our performance in dealing with them, as measured by such things as response times. We will also share results of our customer survey referred to earlier.

Where there is a sudden or unexpectedly large increase in the volume of complaints meaning that the target to process complaints is at risk, we will inform the Office of Rail and Road, Transport Focus and London Travelwatch. Within this notification we will include the reason for the increased correspondence, any mitigation plans, the procedures to ensure the quality of responses is maintained as well as any steps taken to advise our customers.

When we receive a complaint that cannot be resolved face to face or straight away by our Social Media team, we record the complaint and contact details on our dedicated Customer Relations Management (CRM) system. Electronic records currently date back to 2014 and hard copies, such as written letters we receive, are retained for 6 months.



Training and development

We are committed to ensuring our people have the knowledge, skills and are empowered to deal with a complaint about our services. Customer service training is provided in a regular and structured way and we only recruit individuals that have the right skills and behaviours.

In addition to the ongoing training for all our customer facing people, where policies or processes change or where we have identified a training need, additional action will be taken. This may include additional training or briefing either for a specific team or just an individual.

Our Customer Relations team, who handle all of our complaints, receive specific training on our regulated commitments such as those detailed in this procedure, the Passenger's Charter or our Disabled People's Protection Policy (DPPP). This is in addition to more tailored training such as letter writing, complaints investigation and resolution skills.



Reviewing this policy

This policy will be reviewed regularly and changes made when appropriate. Any proposed changes will only be made when approved by the regulator, the Office of Rail and Road, following consultation with Transport Focus and London Travelwatch. Contact details for these three organisations are as follows:

Transport Focus

Freepost RTEH-XAGE-BYKZ
PO BOX 5594
Southend on Sea, SS1 9PZ
Tel: 0300 123 2350
Fax: 08458 501 392
Web: transportfocus.org.uk
advice@transportfocus.org.uk

London TravelWatch

169 Union Street
London, SE1 0LL
Tel: 020 3176 2999
Fax: 020 3176 5991
Web: londontravelwatch.org.uk
enquiries@londontravelwatch.org.uk

Office of Rail and Road

One Kemble Street
London, WC2B 4AN
Tel: 020 7282 2018
Web: orr.gov.uk
contact.cct@orr.gsi.gov.uk