

Building a better railway for the future – webinar

Friday 16 October 2020

Questions and answers

- 1) Not really a question but I'd like to celebrate how transformational the relationship between our local authority and Network Rail has been since the appointment of a NR Industry Programme Director for Devon and Cornwall earlier this year. It feels for the first time we have genuine buy-in from the industry on our local priorities, and someone willing to challenge their own teams and quickly unblock historic issues. Not perfect but certainly more pragmatic decision-making and seeing things from a customer's viewpoint. I don't know whether this experience is shared elsewhere in the country?**

This is great to hear, and reflects our closer partnership working with Network Rail in community rail too. As Network Rail has undergone further devolution, and continued to strive to be more people- and customer-focused under Andrew Haines (CEO)'s leadership, this has brought opportunities for improved collaboration. We now have a community rail lead for each Network Rail region, who we and our members liaise with. We also work closely with Network Rail's sustainability and social value team at a national level, to support effective community engagement and improved recognition of the social value of our railways.

- 2) There are examples in some parts of UK where passengers can look at realtime information on passenger loadings in order to inform their decision which train to catch. To encourage more people to travel by rail shouldn't that information be rolled out across the rail network?**

We agree this type of up-to-the-minute information is helpful for passengers (and prospective passengers) at any time, but especially so at the moment, and there is some variation in approach across the UK. Our members have been working with rail industry partners to promote local awareness about safe and confident use of rail, but in a nuanced way that responds to local circumstances, views and worries. We composed this list to help our members refer local people on to different train operators' information on passenger loading: <https://communityrail.org.uk/travel-confidence-advice-on-quieter-rail-services/>. Also see our briefing on community rail's role in Covid recovery, which talks about the importance of local communications and understanding: <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CR-Network-Recovery-and-Renewal-Sept20.pdf>

While specific train loading information can only be used where the most modern trains measure that information automatically, a new NRE system recently rolled out nationwide serves a similar purpose by indicating to people who are searching for a journey online if a specific train or station is looking busy. The NRE system takes operational messages about busy trains and stations that are sent by frontline rail staff to control rooms and, within five minutes, display these in passenger-friendly language on journey planning websites and apps.

In practice, this means that when people see a red or yellow warning triangle when they search their journey and by clicking on it, they can find out more information and advice. This journey information is complemented by a new information service that updates passengers on how disruption and overcrowding will affect their journey. In addition, this new technology provides alternative travel options, helping people maintain social distancing. Passengers can sign up to alerts from National Rail on 'Alert me by Messenger'.

We believe this technology can play a vital role in giving people confidence to travel by rail, and have therefore been encouraging customers to sign up to this service. More information on this service can be found on the National Rail website [here](#).

- 3) Given that we often talk about communication between rail and our sector how can these reforms lead to better communication between rail and local government? Many councils often find it really difficult to understand who to interact with to deal with quite simple problems, especially around stations.**

Community rail is often able to work with local authorities to assist effective local-level communications and involvement with rail development, including (hopefully!) knowing who to speak to to achieve smaller scale improvements. See our map of community rail partnerships and station groups: <https://communityrail.org.uk/community-rail/meet-our-members/> Many community rail partnerships cover multiple lines and local authority areas; click through to their websites for more info and contact details. You can also try contacting your local train operator's community/sustainability manager. Or, if you're struggling, or there's no community rail coverage in your area and you think there should be, try the person in our support and development team with responsibility for your part of the country: <https://communityrail.org.uk/about-us/meet-the-team/>

Under RDG's proposals for reform, we would envisage more decisions being made by those who best understand the needs of customers and local markets – train operators. This, we believe, would naturally result in more communication and much closer interaction between Train Operating Companies, Network Rail, local authorities and the communities they serve. With the right conditions, and overseen by a new independent national rail body, greater empowerment to train operators, and not more centralised decision-making, would deliver a step change in customer experience.

In the meantime, RDG's Public Affairs team is always happy to help connect you with the right people at Network Rail or Train Operating Companies. They can be contacted on public.affairs@raildeliverygroup.com.