

## **Northern update to Rail North Committee - 081124**

### **Introduction**

Northern's performance improvement plan submitted to Rail North Partnership on 31 October sets out its long-term plans to drive sustainable improvements in performance.

At the emergency Rail North Committee meeting on 30 October, members also asked Northern to provide more information on what is being done to help mitigate the impact of current cancellations on customers, particularly on Sundays in the run up to the Christmas period.

Committee members raised four specific areas and further information is provided below.

### **Rail replacement bus services**

Northern has sought to maximise the availability of rail replacement bus services, this includes planning in additional standby buses to be available for Control teams to deploy if needed.

Northern's suppliers have given high levels of confidence of planned availability for the Christmas period. However, have advised that additional capacity will be challenging due to availability in the market.

Northern is speaking with local service bus providers to understand availability of ticket acceptance to further support customers.

### **Wider ticket acceptance and discretion on penalty fares**

Over two thirds of Northern journeys are on 'any permitted' tickets meaning the customer can already travel on any other train operator. The need for ticket acceptance mostly applies to Advance Purchase and Northern dedicated products.

Northern has a robust ticket acceptance policy to govern planned ticket acceptance. It includes a weekly process to manage ticket acceptance:

- Once it is confirmed which routes may expect significant disruption, Northern contacts relevant train operators (TOCs) with passenger bookings and expected demand information to request acceptance.
- Confirmed ticket acceptance is communicated to colleagues and customers.
- Advance Purchase tickets are also removed from sale to minimise customer volumes.

Other TOCs have been largely supportive, including TransPennine Express. Although there are some gaps due to either other TOCs own capacity challenges or in the case of other transport modes requiring a level of information and commercial agreements which are seen as disproportionate to the ask. Northern continues to engage with all parties and welcomes support provided by DfT and partners to pursue this.

Any on-the-day disruption that is unplanned is considered by the Control team and who then liaise with other TOCs as required to request ticket acceptance.

Revenue teams have been briefed and take a proportionate view when checking tickets.

### **Earlier notice to customers of planned changes**

Northern has reviewed all relevant processes, including strengthening resources in regional and control teams to support earlier notification.

Through current agreements Conductors have seven days to notify Northern on availability, meaning a Monday for the following Sunday. During the week this is then overlaid with sickness / absence, allowing the team to cover as many services as possible. Therefore an accurate picture is only available towards the end of the working week. Stakeholder and customer communications go live as soon as routes are confirmed.

### **Christmas and New Year resilience plan**

As discussed with the Committee on 30 October, Northern has been looking at all available options to provide customers with greater certainty when travelling, especially on Sundays and over the Christmas period. Based on evidence from previous years and current train crew availability we anticipate there will be significant disruption in some areas.

Northern is using local insight, data and trends alongside assumptions on December timetable changes and planned engineering work to understand the direct impact over the Christmas period. This will result in the need to remove some services on certain routes at the earliest opportunity. The next step will be to engage with individual authorities on the detail for affected areas and reach out to customers to help them make informed decisions about their travel plans.

All the above activity is ongoing and Northern will provide a verbal update at the Committee meeting on 20 November.