



OFFICE *of the*
RAIL REGULATOR

SUMMARY OF PRINCIPLES FOR COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURES

Contents

Summary of principles for complaints handling procedures.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Principles.....	1
Accessibility and publicity	2
Simplicity of understanding and use	2
Full and fair investigation.....	3
Effective response and appropriate redress.....	3
Interface with insurance claim publicity and procedures.....	3
Consultation.....	4

Summary of principles for complaints handling procedures

Introduction

1. Passenger and station operators are required to have complaints handling procedures, approved by the Regulator, in place from commencement of licensed operations.
2. Operators are recommended to consult the Citizen's Charter Complaints Task Force booklet "Effective Complaints Systems, Principles and Checklist" in preparing their complaints handling procedures. (Booklet available free of charge from the Citizen's Charter Unit, Government Offices, Horseguards Road, London SW1P 3AL. Tel: (0171) 270 1838). This booklet covers the principles and procedures needed for an effective complaints handling process. Operators are free to propose whatever procedures best suit the needs and expectations of their customers and the requirements of their business. However, this note sets out fundamental principles, which the Regulator will expect to see reflected in any complaints process submitted to him for approval.

Principles

3. Complaints systems should:
 - be easily accessible and well-publicised;
 - be simple to understand and use;
 - allow speedy handling, with established time limits for action, and keep people informed of progress;
 - ensure a full and fair investigation;
 - respect people's desire for confidentiality;
 - address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress;

- provide information to management so that services can be improved;
- observe the Passenger's Charter on matters relating to service performance.

Accessibility and publicity

4. The guiding principle is that it should be easy to complain and to find out to whom a complaint should be addressed. The Regulator's preference is that a notice should be posted in each carriage of a train, as well as at stations. In cases where rolling stock is regularly shared between more than one train operator, the notice could say either:
 - that passengers should consult a notice at their destination station for the name and address to which complaints should be sent; or
 - that passengers can get a complaint/comment/Passenger Charter form from the guard or conductor (in the case of staffed trains).
5. Comment/complaint forms should be available on-train wherever possible as well as at each staffed station. At unstaffed stations, a notice should be displayed saying where claim forms can be obtained. Posters should be prominently displayed at all stations. At multi-operator stations, posters need to make clear who the different contact points are for complaints about different services. An important point is that all material publicising the complaints handling procedure, including posters, should display the address and telephone number of the relevant Rail Users' Consultative Committee(s) (RUCC).

Simplicity of understanding and use

6. All front-line staff should be trained to receive and pass on complaints. The customer should not have to find the "right" person unless they particularly want to. Moreover, passengers may not know to which operator to address a complaint. At the very least, operators should be ready to co-operate in passing on complaints to others if the complainant has come to the wrong operator. The passenger should only have to write one initial letter of complaint. Where appropriate, operators should consider co-ordinating a single response.

7. Operators should have clear internal procedures and timescales for replying to complaints which everyone understands, as well as a system for chasing difficult cases.
8. One option worth considering is giving discretion to certain front-line staff to resolve certain types of complaint on the spot, without reference to senior management. Sensitive on the spot handling of difficult situations may help to avoid a large number of written complaints.

Full and fair investigation

9. The key requirement here is for good, clear internal procedures with minimum recourse to ad hoc decisions on how to deal with a particular complaint.

Effective response and appropriate redress

10. Replies to complaints should mention the relevant RUCC(s) as the next port of call in any case in the letter containing the operator's final offer, but never later than the second reply to the complaint. The address and telephone number of the relevant RUCC(s) should also be given. Operators will need to establish rules or guidance on the types of redress available and the level of authorisation needed.
11. For the system to continue to be effective, a means of regularly reviewing procedures is desirable and there should be some sort of regular report to management on both the number and type of complaint. The Regulator will also wish to see periodic statistics on complaints as part of his regular monitoring of licence compliance. The Regulator will wish RUCC(s) to receive the same information as he receives himself.

Interface with insurance claim publicity and procedures

12. The Claims Allocation and Handling Agreement approved by the Regulator requires his separate approval to arrangements for publicising information on how to make an insurance claim against an operator. Operators will need to consider the options for dealing with on-train information on both complaints and insurance. One possibility is for two separate contact points to be publicised. Another is for one contact point to be identified but for there to be clear internal procedures for insurance claims to be passed on to the relevant handling contact as quickly as possible.

Consultation

13. The Regulator will expect operators as a matter of course to consult their local RUCC(s) and take account of their comments before submitting their complaints procedures to him for approval. It will be a condition of the licence that the RUCC(s) are consulted on all proposed changes to approved procedures before these changes are submitted to the Regulator for approval.

14. In order to meet the requirement to have complaints handling procedures, approved by the Regulator, in place from commencement of licensed operations, operators should:
 - begin their consultation with the RUCC(s) at least eight weeks before commencement of licensed operations;

 - submit their proposed complaints handling procedure to the Regulator at least three weeks before commencement of licensed operations.