



Department
for Transport

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From the Minister of State
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Dear Paul

Compliance with rail accessibility requirements for 1 January 2020

It is extremely disappointing that the rail industry and train operators will fail to meet the deadline to provide accessible trains for every passenger and every journey by the end of the year.

Owners and operators have had 10 years to prepare for the 31 December 2019 deadline. It is deeply frustrating that disabled passengers will still be waiting into 2020 to see accessibility improvements to some services.

The Government is absolutely committed to ensuring that all passengers can travel by rail with ease and confidence. The Secretary of State's powers to permit non-compliant vehicles to continue in operation has not been used lightly and should never result in detriment to the quality of disabled passengers' journeys.

I do acknowledge the efforts the industry has made so far to achieve compliance, for example through investment in new trains and carriages. I also acknowledge that delays in the delivery of some new trains by manufacturers has affected the industry's ability to meet the deadline.

However, despite such a significant period of time for the rail industry to prepare, I understand that were all non-compliant trains removed from service there would be a disproportionately negative effect on the provision of services for passengers.

Thus I have reluctantly agreed to issue strictly time-limited dispensation notices to a number of operators for around 1,200 carriages in the national fleet with two major conditions attached:

1. That operators are required to provide evidence that the introduction of new or refurbished vehicles remains on track.
2. Operators understand they are also legally bound to deliver the commitments they made to providing information, journey planning assistance, mobility assistance and operational mitigations such as coupling non-compliant vehicles to compliant ones, where possible.

I also understand there is more work needed to prevent the practice of operating rail replacement bus and coach services that are not compliant with relevant accessibility regulations. Currently I am only willing to grant a short one-month extension for the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 January 2020 to ensure that passengers are not left without rail replacement services during this time.

During this time, I expect TOCs to do all they can to source compliant vehicles before considering using non-compliant ones. Where non-compliant vehicles are used, TOCs must provide passengers who require it with accessible alternative transport, such as taxis. Arrangements must be made in advance to ensure such alternative transport is readily available during planned engineering works, to avoid any unnecessary and extended waiting periods for those passengers who require it.

The Government's position is unequivocal. The industry must urgently address the issue of providing accessible rail carriages and replacement bus and coach services. Delivering an accessible service for every passenger on every rail journey is essential to creating an inclusive and accessible railway. It must not be delayed any longer.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Chris Heaton-Harris MP

Minister of State for Transport