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Dear Ian,

The accessibility of London Midland Class 323s by 2020

We have engaged previously on outlining the Department's proposals for targeting the rail industry's efforts at those features of rail vehicles that have the greatest negative impact on the ability of disabled passengers to use particular vehicles, particularly with a view to their operation past 31 December 2019. I have since written, explaining what would be expected on those vehicles owned by Porterbrook that are currently subject to the Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 1998.

At your request, on 30 January, I assessed a Class 323 unit at Soho depot for compliance against the RVAR and the Technical Specification for Interoperability - Persons with Reduced Mobility. This is shown in the attached checklist - I am sorry for the delay in getting it to you.

Based on the Government's stated intention of an accessible rail fleet (by at least 1 January 2020) and our understanding of some of the engineering challenges on this fleet, we have amended the checklist to show:

- The areas on the vehicles which are already compliant with either RVAR or the PRM TSI (labelled with yellow);
- Those non-compliant areas of the unit which are not expected to be corrected (unless a novel solution arises) as either:
 - they deliver only marginal improvements in accessibility;
 - compliance would involve significant re-engineering of the vehicle eg. closing the step riser is not possible without reworking the entire door mechanism; or
 - a marginal improvement in one area could adversely affect accessibility in another eg. increasing both wheelchair support structures from 670 to 700mm would reduce the throughway to the toilet by 60mm (although you will see that the toilet itself is expected to receive attention if it is retained).These areas are shown on the checklist in green;

- Those areas (shown in red) where improvements to accessibility will need to be achieved in order for these vehicles to operate beyond the End Date;

- One area (priority seats) where a marginal non-compliance (cushion width) may remain if the seats are retained but other non-compliances around clearances need to be rectified (shown in green and red hashing); and
- Finally, areas (shown in yellow and red hashing) where partial compliance has been achieved already but full compliance is needed eg. no internal PIS is fitted but the front end, external PIS is compliant.

There are five principal areas where further accessibility is expected:

- Audio-visual PIS must be provided. During the audit, we wondered if the hardware that has been fitted for a commercial/news service could be adapted for this purpose. Since then I have met with the company involved, to discuss a development of this product on another fleet, and they doubt whether it would be possible to use the hardware on 323s for a compliant PIS;
- Two flexible spaces are available that could already be used by wheelchair users (provided they can negotiate the narrow clearway [690mm] between the draught screens – which will need attention). However, the two possible support structures (currently each 670mm wide – which can be accepted if they remain unaltered) each contain a rubbish bin, which would need to be resited. Signage must also be improved;
- Some allowance for priority seating needs to be made. Those positions currently signed as such do not provide compliant clearances;
- Improvements to the handrails in the doorways should be made. Attendees during the visit believed that a better, more rounded profile could be provided without impinging on the throughway (which is limited by the lower door pillar rather than the distance between the handrails). The height range could also be improved (though possibly not to a fully compliant height) without necessarily obstructing the door controls; and
- The toilet will need to be made wheelchair accessible if it is retained.

I hope this is helpful to you, and would be happy to consider the solutions you propose. We would also welcome a breakdown of indicative costs. This position has been agreed with colleagues elsewhere in DfT Rail & National Networks and DPTAC. They should not be used as a precedent on other vehicles, unless the surrounding conditions are exactly the same as this fleet. Equally, you understand that the Department's policy of targeted compliance relates only to existing vehicles, and provides no grounds for building new vehicles with similar non-compliances in the future.

I am copying this to Brian Freemantle and Peter Randall here, and DPTAC.

Yours sincerely,

John Bengough
Accessibility Technical Standards Manager