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20 December 2010

Dear Michaela,

Accessibility of the national train fleet by 2020

We have been engaged for some years now in outlining the Department's expectations 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 certain vehicles, particularly with a view to their operation past 31 December 2019.

You are aware that, as a result of the financial constraints faced by the Government, Ministers asked us to look again at the levels of compliance with access standards that we had been agreeing with vehicle owners, in order to establish whether any further non-essential items could be identified.

As a result of discussions with vehicle owners, the Office of Rail Regulation and DPTAC (our statutory advisors on the transport needs of disabled people), three additional areas have been identified where compliance will not be required by 1 January 2020 on pre-1999 fleets. As with all areas of "targeted compliance", it remains desirable for these features to be provided, however this will not be mandatory.

The three features are:

- Non-provision of dedicated step/threshold lighting (4.2.2.5 of the PRM TSI) – however, this emphasises the importance of providing, and keeping clean, the step/threshold contrast strip;
- Acceptance of door control enable tones whose duration is less than prescribed by the PRM TSI (section 4.2.2.4.2.1); and
- Non-provision of a door control enable tone where these do not already exist – but only on fleets where door controls are not fitted (or are not used in regular service) as all the doors are opened automatically or by the train crew (section 4.2.2.4.2.1 of the PRM TSI).

These features are additional to the accepted areas of non-compliance shown on the individual fleet compliance checklists that we have previously shared with you.

In due course, Angel Trains will be able to ask the Department for a formal determination/dispensation under the Railways (Interoperability) Regulations (RIR) for those non-compliances which need not be rectified. This would then allow applicable fleets, if so desired, to operate past the 1 January 2020 date for rail vehicles to be accessible. The RIR are currently being updated and a revised version is expected to come into force in November 2011.

I would also like to that this opportunity to encourage the rail industry to agree a common system for fixing manual board ramps in place when in use. Due to a failure to co-ordinate a single fixing method in the past, there are several different designs used on the post-1998 fleet – often at the same station and by the same operator. The multiplicity of designs, and pressure on dwell times, often means that staff use non-compliant ramps, without fixing pins, on all classes of train – which is likely to be a breach of accessibility regulations. Given the number of pre-1999 vehicles which will need compliant, fixable ramps in the years before 2020, there must be considerable economies available by agreeing a common design.

I am copying this to Brian Freemantle and Peter Randall here, George Davidson at Transport Scotland, Mark Price at Transport Wales and DPTAC. I am also copying to the Office of Rail Regulation, as the body responsible for enforcing the End Date.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John Bengough', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

John Bengough
Head of Domestic Policy
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