



Department
for Transport

From the Minister of State
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Jacqueline Starr
CEO Rail Delivery Group (RDG)

By email

11 December 2020

Dear Jacqueline

Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations 2000 (PSVAR): RDG Progress Report November 2020 and compliance with PSVAR for Rail Replacement Services (RRS) 1 January to 30 September 2021

I am responding to Paul Plummer's letter of 18 November enclosing RDG's latest quarterly progress report on the use of PSVAR compliant vehicles for rail replacement services during the current period of Special Authorisations. It is positive to see from your latest report that you and your members have again achieved high levels of compliance, but I remain disappointed with a situation where fully accessible vehicles cannot always be provided for all passengers using Rail Replacement services. Rail must be accessible to all.

I acknowledge this is not an issue that can be resolved by the rail industry alone, and appreciate the efforts being made to reach a solution, which is apparent in your latest report, further improvements to enhance the National Rail Enquires journey planner with additional accessibility information, and continued engagement with the coach industry and wider accessibility stakeholders.

I am committed to ensuring that disabled people have the same access to transport services and opportunities to travel as other members of society, and for assistance to be provided when required to enable them to travel confidently, easily and without extra cost.

My officials will continue to work with you and other relevant stakeholders to explore a longer-term and more sustainable solution over the coming months to ensure that accessible Rail Replacement services can be delivered, including linking to the application of PSVAR to home-to-school services.

Therefore, I have agreed to allow coach and bus operators who provide Rail Replacement services, to apply for strictly time-limited special authorisations pursuant to s.178 of the Equality Act 2010 for a period of up to 9 months from 1st January 2021 to 30th September 2021.

Although I am providing the opportunity to apply for these special authorisations, I expect RDG and the Train Operating Companies (TOCs) to do the following:

1. TOCs must source and use PSVAR compliant vehicles wherever possible in the first instance, and only use a non-compliant vehicle that has been granted a special authorisation when all other compliant options have been exhausted
2. When no PSVAR compliant vehicle is available TOCs must provide alternative accessible transport for disabled passengers which offers the same levels of service as those for non-disabled passengers with no detriment (for example on comfort, safety and waiting times) to those passengers
3. Arrangements must be made in advance during planned engineering works to ensure such alternative accessible transport is readily available, to avoid any unnecessary and extended waiting periods for those passengers who require it – particularly if they have requested a wheelchair space or passenger assistance.
4. RDG will continue to provide me with a written update every 3 months setting out what progress has been made in delivering fully-PSVAR compliant rail replacement services.
5. The industry will continue to work with the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) during this period of special authorisations, and will provide data on the level of compliance with PSVAR for Rail Replacement services, the use of non-PSVAR-compliant vehicles, the number and types of alternatives provided (e.g. taxis), and the number of complaints that are received in respect of TOCs where the alternatives provided have fallen short of expectations of safety, comfort and timing.

My officials will also explore DPTAC's proposal for the formation of a multi-stakeholder steering group to guide and inform, ensuring that maximum compliance is achieved whenever possible and that all solutions have been considered. The proposed group would involve the RDG, the ORR and other stakeholders and I am sure that the RDG and its members will engage with this fully.

The Government's position on PSVAR remains the same: delivering an accessible service for every passenger on every rail journey is essential to creating an inclusive and accessible railway. I know that this is an aim that you also share and I look forward to RDG continuing to play an active role as we all work towards achieving full accessibility.

Yours Sincerely,

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

Chris Heaton-Harris MP

Minister of State for Transport