

25th February 1999

OPRAF consults on New Performance Measure

OPRAF today began consulting the rail industry and passenger representatives on a new standard measurement of overall operational performance which would reflect the experience of all passengers.

The Passenger's Charter statistics have been used for some time, and provide a historical track record of performance since privatisation. But there are a number of exclusions from these statistics which mean that Charter, while adequate as a means of establishing compensation levels for season ticket holders, has limitations as a measure of overall performance. Most Sunday services are excluded, as are off-peak trains on commuter services, delays outside the control of the rail industry, and days which are declared void because no effective service has been provided (in which case season ticket holders are separately compensated).

OPRAF is therefore seeking the views of the industry and the Rail Users' Consultative Committees on what should be adopted as a new standard measurement of overall operational performance. The measure must reflect the actual experience of all passengers, be consistent with their preferences and priorities, and be generally accepted by all parties. Passenger's Charter data would still be collated, and would continue to provide the means of compensating season ticket holders and ensuring reliable comparisons with past performance.

Launching the consultation, Franchising Director John O'Brien said:

"When OPRAF first began publishing performance data, we adopted Passenger's Charter as the measure because it was readily available, well established, and widely accepted and understood. However, we have been aware of its limitations, and I was particularly concerned at the dramatic increase in the number of days being declared void by operators last autumn. Because I felt this had the potential to skew the performance figures for some operators, I raised the issue at the performance summit held by ministers in November last year.

"Since then OPRAF has been actively considering the alternatives, and preliminary discussions with passenger representatives suggest that they share our view that change is needed. But I would not wish to introduce such a radical change as a move away from Passenger's Charter without wide consultation on the alternatives. I have therefore begun this process today by writing to all the interested parties, and I now look forward to a constructive debate. I expect the result to be a measure which is accurate and meaningful, as well as widely accepted and understood. "

Possible alternatives to Passenger's Charter as an overall performance measure include:

Charter style measure - some re-working of the Passenger 's Charter figures, but with less (or no) exclusions.

Train delay minutes - actual minutes delay per train between specified points. As used in the Railtrack performance regime to apportion responsibility for delays. This could be averaged (using, for example, number of trains or train miles) to provide comparative figures.

Average passenger lateness - average minutes lateness experienced by passengers, according to estimates of the number of passengers affected by delays at specified monitoring points. As used in most OPRAF incentive regimes and in the Railtrack performance regime.

The consultation process will include discussion with all train operators, Passenger Transport Executives, Railtrack, Rail Users ' Consultative Committees, the London Regional Passengers Committee, the Office of the Rail Regulator, and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The aim is to introduce the new performance measures by autumn 1999.