Rail regulator's review prompts industry action on website accessibility and passenger information

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The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) has led train and station operators to improve passenger information on websites, and to confirm operators are fulfilling commitments to achieve industry-recognised accessibility standards.

The improvements come after the rail regulator's two separate reviews in 2020 to analyse compliance with website requirements for all 25 operators.

Requirements include providing a source of relevant information on assisted travel on websites, and working towards achieving Website Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards to make sure websites can be read and used by disabled passengers.

ORR's review has ensured content about accessible travel is easier to find by making it be located in one clear area of an operator's website – this includes containing information on temporary reductions in accessibility, details of any delays or disruptions to facilities and services.

The same review has also seen operators provide clearer information on what redress may be owed to passengers that did not get the assistance they booked.

Disability charity, the Shaw Trust, helped ORR undertake the technical assessment of compliance with the WCAG standards. This found 11 of the 25 train and station operators had already carried out extensive work to ensure their websites met the standard prior to the review. Several used this exercise as an opportunity to ramp up the work they had already planned.

This work will mean all operators' websites will be accessible to assistive technologies such as screen readers, all policy and guidance documents will be fully accessible, and sufficient colour contrast between text and the background will be applied across all web pages.

ORR is encouraged by operators' efforts to date and will monitor their commitments to complete improvements by December 2021.

Stephanie Tobyn, Deputy Director of Consumers, said: "Websites are incredibly important and often the starting point in a passenger's journey. They help passengers plan and book their journey, including travel assistance and claim redress if necessary.

"Our review identified a number of areas for improvement, and we're pleased that operators are responding promptly to our findings; making assisted travel content easier to find and working towards compliance with website accessibility standards sooner rather than later.

"This work to improve website accessibility sits alongside the ongoing training of front-line staff to better understand the needs of disabled passengers. These are both parts of our Accessible Travel Policy requirements which look to make improvements across all parts of a disabled passenger's journey."

In March, ORR announced tens of thousands of railway staff are being trained to communicate more effectively with disabled passengers, understand the challenges they may face when travelling, and to refresh their knowledge and skills to provide any assistance needed.

By the end of 2021, almost 30,000 passenger-facing staff will have undertaken disability awareness and equality training as part of requirements set out in the Office of Rail and Road's (ORR) Accessible Travel Policy (ATP) Guidance.

Photo credit: Office of Rail and Road