

Customer Complaints Handling Procedure



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www.eastcoast.co.uk

EAST COAST

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1. Introduction



Welcome to the East Coast Main Line Company. We're a subsidiary of Directly Operated Railways, the new train operating company established by the Government. East Coast has day-to-day responsibility for the operation of train services between London King's Cross and Peterborough, the East Midlands, Yorkshire, the North-East of England and Scotland.

We want you to be delighted with our services wherever you come into contact with our business. At East Coast, we aim to deliver consistently high standards of safety, performance, and customer service; from reliable trains to friendly, efficient staff. We understand that without satisfied customers, our business can't grow.

There may be times however when our high standards are not met. If you are not happy with our services in any way, we welcome your comments and feedback. We want to resolve any problems you might have experienced as promptly and effectively as possible and your feedback is invaluable in helping us improve our services for the future.

The East Coast Customer Complaints Handling Procedure sets out the processes we employ for dealing with complaints and comments. It establishes our commitments in relation to how we deal with complaints and the service you can expect from us. It includes:

- How to make a complaint and who to contact;
- How we will make it as easy as possible for you to get in touch with us;
- How we will respond to your complaint and when you can expect a response;
- How we will deal with your complaint fairly;
- The types of compensation you can expect; and
- How we review and monitor the complaints we receive, our response to them and the effectiveness of this policy.

Although East Coast aims to resolve all complaints to your satisfaction, quickly and effectively, without the need for the involvement of third parties, the policy also gives further information on independent bodies you can contact if you are unhappy with the response we have provided.

Our Customer Complaints Handling Procedure is formally reviewed each year in consultation with Passenger Focus, London TravelWatch and the Department for Transport. If you have any suggestions about how you think we could improve it, or any other aspects of the service, please contact me:

*Karen Boswell
Managing Director,
East Coast,
East Coast House,
25 Skeldergate,
York YO1 6DH.*

1.1 Our Customer Complaints

Handling Procedure

East Coast is committed to continually improving the service we provide our customers. We want our customers to choose East Coast again and again because we consistently deliver the service we say we will in every aspect of our business, from running a reliable train service to ensuring you receive prompt and professional response to correspondence. We aim to always put our customers first and we understand that it is often the little things that matter most in delivering customer service excellence.

In spite of our efforts, we realise that from time to time, things do go wrong. When this happens, we will investigate matters fully and give customers an explanation for the failure, regardless of who was responsible, ourselves, our contractors, or our suppliers.

1.2 What is a Complaint?

A complaint is defined as:

“Any expression of dissatisfaction by a customer or potential customer about service delivery by the company or its agents, and/or about company or industry policy.”

Every time you voice dissatisfaction about any aspect of our business, our staff will take your comments seriously. We believe that by responding positively and proactively to your complaints and comments we will not only retain our existing customers, but attract new ones. We appreciate that customer feedback is vital in helping us deliver continuous improvement across our business.

1.3 Our Promise

The Customer Complaints Handling Procedure is designed to make sure your complaint is dealt with efficiently, fairly and effectively. We will ensure our procedure is:

- Easy - to find and well publicised;
- Simple - to understand and use;
- Efficient – setting out when you can expect a response from us;
- Fair – ensuring each complaint is investigated fully and fairly;
- Respectful – respecting your desire for confidentiality;
- Effective – addressing all the points you raise and providing an effective response and appropriate redress;
- Monitored – regularly monitored and audited to ensure it is effective and to allow improvements to be made;
- Reported – providing information to management so services can be improved; and
- Consistent – with the standards set out in our Passenger’s Charter.

2. Talking to us

2.1 Our staff

In the first instance, if you are unhappy about any aspect of our service, please approach a member of our staff. All of our station and on-train staff, including those not directly employed by us such as sub-contractors and agency staff, are trained to help our customers. The member of staff will try, where possible, to resolve your complaint immediately involving his or her supervisor or appropriate manager if necessary.

However if your complaint cannot be resolved on the spot, we will pass it on to our Customer Relations department to enable the complaint to be made formally.

2.2 Our Customer Relations Team

Our Customer Relations team is easily contactable and have been specially trained to deal with your comments and complaints.

There are several ways to contact them:

Telephone: **08457 225 333**

Textphone: **08451 202 067**

(via our Assisted Travel team)

Opening Hours 08:30-17:00 Monday to Friday excluding Bank Holidays. Outside these hours an answer phone is available for customers to leave a message and phone number. A member of the Customer Relations department will return the call no later than the next working day. Calls from UK landlines will be charged at local rates.

Email: customers@eastcoast.co.uk

Post: East Coast,
FREEPOST RRZG-ZZZX-LKXX,
Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 5DN

2.3 Our website – www.eastcoast.co.uk

The contact details for the Customer Relations team can be found on our website and you can email them directly. It also gives full details of how to make a complaint.

You can download our Customer Complaints Handling Procedure and the Passenger's Charter online.

2.4 Comments and Compliments forms

You can also use one of our Comments and Compliments forms to make a complaint or comment on our service. They are available from our on-train team, our website www.eastcost.co.uk and from our staffed stations. You can hand these forms to any of our staff on our trains or at our stations and they will be dealt with in accordance with this procedure.

2.5 'Meet the Manager' sessions

You can also talk to us by attending one of our regular 'Meet the Manager' sessions where local and senior managers are available at certain times at stations to discuss issues or answer your questions. These sessions are held annually at all East Coast stations and at King's Cross, Edinburgh and Leeds stations. They are well publicised in advance via station posters, in stakeholder communications, and on our website, www.east.coast.co.uk. Please contact the Customer Relations team for details of future sessions near you. The format for Meet the Manager Sessions is designed to encourage face to face dialogue and engagement with customers rather than address particular complaints.

3. Our Complaint Handling Process

Our complaint handling process is simple and easy to use.

3.1 If you make a complaint directly to a member of staff:

- The member of staff will try to resolve your complaint on the spot involving their local manager or supervisor if necessary;
- Where this is not possible, the local manager, if appropriate, may investigate to try and resolve the problem quickly, in which case they will contact you directly;
- If your complaint is still not resolved it will be passed to the Customer Relations team and dealt with as described in section 3.2 below.

3.2 If you make a complaint to the Customer Relations Team using a Comments and Compliments form or by contacting them directly:

- Our Customer Relations staff will enter your complaint onto our Customer Relations Management System. This enables them to view all the information on your case and pass it to the appropriate members of staff for investigation quickly;
- We assess the complaint for its complexity. We will investigate the issues you raise and respond as quickly as possible;
- If you have provided a daytime phone number we may attempt to resolve your complaint by telephone. If you agree that the issue is resolved, then at the end of this call, we will not contact you again on the matter by phone or post;

- If you are unhappy with our first response, and if relevant any recompense we have offered you, your complaint will be reviewed by our Customer Relations Manager or our Customer Service Development Manager. We will respond to you again either supporting our original response or explaining a new decision. Our second response will include the name and position of the manager who has reviewed your case. It will also explain the role of Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch and provide their contact details;
- If you are unhappy with our second response, you can refer your complaint to Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch. These organisations are independent bodies, set up to protect the interests of rail users. They can review your case and make representation to us on your behalf. Contact details and more information on Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch can be found in the Contact Information section at the end of this procedure.

3.3 Customers with specific needs

We appreciate that some of our customers who have specific access requirements or whose first language is not English may have difficulties communicating with us. We will handle these cases sensitively and give our responses in an appropriate format. We will make provision for customers who are visually impaired or hard of hearing. A textphone service is available from our Assisted Travel team who can deal with your complaint and liaise with our Customer Relations team as appropriate. Where possible, we will make provision for customers whose first language is not English.

3.4 Complaints about another train operator

If you wish to make a complaint about another train operating company whose services call at East Coast stations, our Customer Relations team can provide their contact details.

If you complain to us about another operator we will:

- Forward your complaint to the Customer Relations Department of the relevant operator within five working days;
- Send you a letter within five working days acknowledging receipt of the complaint and explaining it has been forwarded. We will give the full address and contact details of where the letter has been forwarded to; and
- Keep a record of the correspondence.

The other train operator will respond to your complaint in line with its own complaint handling procedure.

3.5 Complaints involving more than one operator

If you make a complaint to us involving more than one operator, we will follow the guidance issued by the Strategic Rail Authority Guidelines Annex B 'Principles for Dealing with Complaints involving Two or More Operators'. We will either (dependent on the complexity of the case):

- Deal with our aspects of the complaint and advise you which aspects will be replied to by the other operator; or
- Co-ordinate a single response on behalf of all the operators involved.

We will co-operate with other transport providers outside the railway industry where a complaint involves both East Coast and another transport operator.

4. Response times

When you complain directly to a member of our staff, either on the phone or in person, we will try to resolve the complaint immediately.

However if this is not possible and/or your complaint has been passed to the Customer Relations team we aim to meet the target response times below:

4.1 Our target response times

We aim to respond fully to all complaints, including complex ones, within 10 working days whether you contact us by letter, phone, email, fax, in person or using a Comments and Compliments form.

If you have not received a full response within 10 working days, we will ensure you are sent an update advising you of the progress made on your case, and will continue to update you every 10 days until a full response is provided.

4.2 Busy periods

We will make reasonable endeavours to ensure we meet our response times even when there is an unexpected increase in the volume of complaints received. However if there are exceptional circumstances, such as a period of major disruption, we may, with agreement from the Department for Transport, increase these response times. We will notify customers via our website www.eastcoast.co.uk if this is the case and make every effort to respond to you as soon as we can.

4.3 Referral to Passenger Focus or London

TravelWatch

If your complaint has been referred to either Passenger Focus or London TravelWatch, we will provide a full response to 90% of referrals within 10 working days and 100% of referrals within 20 working days. Please note that these response times are from receipt of correspondence from these independent bodies regarding your case by our Customer Relations department.

The referrals will be reviewed by our Customer Service Development Manager or nominated deputy. Please note that once Passenger Focus or London TravelWatch are investigating your case our Customer Service Development Manager may decide to respond to these organisations rather than to you directly.

5. A full and fair investigation

We promise we will investigate all complaints made to us, fully and fairly. We will:

- Ensure we will follow our Customer Complaints Handling Procedure consistently;
- Make every effort to address all the issues raised in your complaint in our responses to you;
- Provide full and relevant explanations for the actions or policies being complained about; and
- Explain how you can contact independent bodies if you are unhappy with our second response.

Our Customer Relations department will handle any comment or complaint that requires an internal investigation. If we carry out an in-house investigation, we will ensure it is undertaken thoroughly and fairly.

We will:

- Thoroughly check the relevant facts;
- Ensure that we are not biased towards anyone involved;
- Obtain responses from all appropriate staff and suppliers such as:-
 - Members of the East Coast staff regarding incidents;
 - Managers regarding policy issues; and
 - Suppliers who provide goods and services to us.

We will provide a full response to your complaint.

Our response to you will include:

- The outcome of any internal investigation we have made;
- The actions we have taken to remedy the source of your dissatisfaction and improve our service to you; and
- Any compensation we are offering you if appropriate.

6. Compensation

We will offer you compensation if we believe it is appropriate. We will determine the amount of compensation we will offer you in accordance with the National Rail Conditions of Carriage, our Passenger's Charter and by internal guidelines.

Compensation will usually be offered in the form of:

- National Rail Travel Vouchers for payment or part payment of a future journey;
- Complimentary ticket(s) for a future journey; or
- A cheque.

Our Passenger's Charter explains our compensation policy, including the level of redress you can expect during service disruption. You can obtain copies of our Passenger's Charter from our Customer Relations team, from staffed stations and from our website, www.eastcoast.co.uk

7. Unreasonable, aggressive or abusive customers

We understand that if you perceive we have not met our standards of customer service, you might feel angry or upset. However whilst we respect the rights of our customers to express their views, we will not tolerate aggressive, threatening or abusive actions of any kind towards members of our staff.

We reserve the right to terminate any correspondence or communication that we believe to be 'frivolous, vexatious or abusive' in line with the guidelines issued by the Strategic Rail Authority in February 2005 (Annex A). We will consult fully with the Department for Transport, Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch before we terminate any correspondence and inform the customer in writing of the reasons behind our decision.

8. Confidentiality

We will protect your confidentiality.

Your personal details or details about your complaint will not be divulged to any third parties unless we have your consent in writing or it is necessary for us to fulfil our own obligations either to:

- Members of Parliament, the Department for Transport, other train operators, Passenger Focus and/or London TravelWatch in order to facilitate their investigations; and
- The Police on request, in order to support their investigation of crimes.

Our Customer Relations department will comply with the Data Protection Act at all times.

9. Monitoring and reporting

9.1 Monitoring

We monitor our Customer Complaints Handling Procedure to ensure it is effective in a number of ways:

- We monitor telephone calls to our Customer Relations Department to ensure our team are handling your complaints in a friendly, appropriate and professional manner;
- Our Service Quality Manager samples and reviews the written responses made by our team with our Customer Relations Manager to ensure your complaints are being dealt with promptly and effectively;

- Every four weeks, randomly selected customers are invited to complete a customer satisfaction form on our response to their complaint. These satisfaction rates are monitored to ensure you are happy with our response;
- Our Customer Relations team enter details of complaints received onto our Customer Relations Management System. This database enables us to record and monitor the number and type of complaints received along with average response times.

9.2 Management reports

The information obtained from our monitoring processes is used to assess whether we are handling your complaints efficiently and that customers are satisfied with our responses. The analysis of your feedback helps us identify areas where we can improve the service we provide.

To ensure our managers drive improvement, we:

- Send appropriate managers and directors at all levels comment and complaint details and summaries for their areas of responsibility at least every four weeks. Managers are expected to use the information to identify areas that require improvement and to remedy them;
- Provide a summary of comments and complaints to the Board of Directors every four weeks so issues can be addressed quickly and managers at all levels are aware of the issues;
- Constantly monitor performance targets for handling customer comments and complaints and seek improved processes;
- Submit reports to the DfT, Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch every four weeks on our performance in handling complaints. Response times and customer satisfaction ratings are included; and

- Provide information to the DfT, Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch in the format and at the intervals required by the Department for Transport on the number of comments and complaints we receive and our performance in dealing with them.

10. Claims for losses, property damage or personal injury

If you wish to make a claim against East Coast for losses, property damage or personal injury this should be made in writing by email or letter to our Customer Relations team (see Contact Information in section 12 of this leaflet). Our Customer Relations team will either deal with your claim or pass it to our Insurance and Claims handlers.

The rail industry has an arrangement called the Claims Allocation and Handling Agreement (CAHA). We, like all train operating companies, must comply with the CAHA and your claims will be dealt with in accordance with this agreement. Under the CAHA, compensation should be dealt with by the companies for their own customers. If some or all responsibility is allocated to another party, the insurance companies balance the payments without involving the customer.

We have internal processes for the handling of claims by third parties which fall within East Coast's jurisdiction. These processes are periodically reviewed by our Insurers and Claims Handlers.

11. Reviewing our procedure

Our Customer Complaints Handling Procedure is formally reviewed every year in consultation with the Department for Transport, Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch.

12. Contact Information

We want to make it as easy as possible for you to contact us if you need to comment or make a complaint about our services.

12.1 Publicising our contact details

We publicise our contact details in the following ways:

Via our website – www.eastcoast.co.uk

The contact details for the Customer Relations Team can be found on our website and you can email them directly at customers@eastcoast.co.uk. It also gives full details of how to make a complaint.

On posters at stations and on trains

Full contact details for our Customer Relations team, and how to make a comment about our services, are displayed on posters at our stations and in each carriage of all our trains on information notices. Route maps, where displayed, also give full contact information.

Full contact details for Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch are also included on these posters and notices.

In our publications

Our Passenger's Charter and timetables (although not always timetable derivatives for space and legibility reasons) also give the contact details of our Customer Relations team.

In local phone directories

We ensure our telephone numbers are listed in local phone directories.

12.2 Our Customer Relations Team's

Contact Details

Telephone: **08457 225 333**

Textphone: **08451 202 067**

(via our Assisted Travel team)

Opening Hours 08:30-17:00 Monday to Friday excluding Bank Holidays.

Email: customers@eastcoast.co.uk

Post: East Coast,
FREEPOST RRZG-ZZZX-LKXX,
Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 5DN

12.3 Availability of our Customer Complaints Handling Procedure

A copy of our Customer Complaints Handling Procedure can be found on our website www.eastcoast.co.uk. The procedure is also available in printed format from our Customer Relations team on request. Our Customer Relations team is happy to supply the Customer Complaints Handling Procedure in a variety of formats (such as braille, large print, audio etc.) on request.

12.4 Contacting Independent Consumer

Watchdogs

Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch are independent consumer watchdogs, established by Parliament to protect and champion passengers' interests. They work with train companies, Network Rail, Government and others to get the best deal for rail passengers. One of their responsibilities is to look at cases where passengers are not happy with our response when something has gone wrong.

East Coast will always try to address your comments and concerns in a fair and reasonable way in accordance with the National Rail Conditions of Carriage, our Customer Complaints Handling Procedure and our Passenger's Charter. However, if you are not happy with our response you can contact Passenger Focus or London TravelWatch. They will consider your case and, where they believe it is appropriate, will follow things up with us on your behalf.



You can contact Passenger Focus about any issue, except those that are wholly to do with London King's Cross and Stevenage stations or journeys between those stations.

Website: www.passengerfocus.org.uk
Telephone: 0300 123 2350
Email: info@passengerfocus.org.uk
Post: Passenger Focus,
FREEPOST (RRRE-ETTC-LEET),
PO BOX 4257,
Manchester M60 3AR .
Fax: 0845 850 1392

For issues that are wholly to do with London King's Cross or Stevenage stations or journeys between those stations please contact London TravelWatch:



Website: www.londontravelwatch.org.uk
Telephone: 020 7505 9000
Email: enquiries@londontravelwatch.org.uk
Post: London TravelWatch,
6 Middle Street ,
London EC1A 7JA.
Fax: 020 7505 9003



England-Scotland services
 Yorkshire services

Stations managed by East Coast

Connecting services