Amtrak can better use its customer service data to improve the customer experience

April 22, 2024

WASHINGTON – Amtrak can better use the data it already collects to improve the customer experience, according to a report from the Amtrak Office of Inspector General released today.

The OIG identified three opportunities, mostly related to communications, for Amtrak to use its customer feedback data to bolster its overall service improvement efforts.

First, the OIG found that customers on delayed trains received communications about those delays at widely varying times or sometimes not at all. Sometimes, notifications about delays on long-distance trains came 12, 16, and 24 hours after the delays began, the report said.

Amtrak could not easily determine whether it sent communications about specific en route delays, nor when it sent them, however, because the communications were not stored in a centralized repository and not readily accessible. During the audit, Amtrak's Digital Technology department consolidated all of the communications Amtrak sends to one repository but the data are still not easy to access or filter, according to Amtrak officials, so they are working to create dashboards to provide easier access to this information.

The second opportunity the OIG identified was that Amtrak could better use its existing data to measure and improve the performance of its call centers. Amtrak's primary measure for call center performance is average speed to answer, which it improved to five minutes and 30 seconds in fiscal year 2023 but is still above its goal of two minutes and 30 seconds.

At the same time, the OIG found Amtrak does not measure or have goals related to other commonly used metrics in the call center industry. This includes abandoned calls (about 25 percent of Amtrak's calls were abandoned in FY 2022 and 15 percent were abandoned in FY 2023). For abandoned calls, OIG research suggests that call center industry averages are approximately 5 percent, and acceptable upper limits are from 9 to 10 percent. In addition, Amtrak does not have goals to address the number of calls on hold for 30 minutes or longer. As a result, Amtrak is missing an opportunity to fully evaluate its call center performance and determine how much to invest to improve these aspects of the customer experience, the report said.

The third opportunity identified by the OIG was that Amtrak could improve its internal use of customer feedback. The OIG found that a recently developed feature used to track actions in response to customer feedback faced challenges because Marketing department officials did not include Operations personnel when developing this feature.

The OIG recommended a series of actions to improve Amtrak's use of customer feedback data, including establishing thresholds and goals to measure its performance in communicating with customers, measuring other aspects of call center performance, and conducting a review of its recent changes to the call center case management system. The company agreed with the recommendations and plans to address them.

More information is included in the full report which can be downloaded on the OIG's website: https://direc.to/k1Cd.

Reports of fraud, waste, or abuse; criminal or unethical acts affecting Amtrak's property or operations; or mismanagement in Amtrak programs or operations can be made 24 hours a day via the Amtrak OIG Hotline at 1-800-468-5469 or online at https://direc.to/hPAu.

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