

Cross Country Supplementary Research: Exploring attitudes to interchange and the reasons why rail users and other travellers may not use Cross Country



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**Cross Country Rail Franchise: Supplementary
Research**
Debrief

Prepared for
Transport Focus



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Background, objectives and methodology

The 2019 Cross Country franchise award and the need for research

The Cross Country franchise

The Department for Transport (DfT) is due to open the bidding process for the next Cross Country franchise in 2018, awarding a **new contract in 2019**.

In 2016, **Transport Focus**, as the independent watchdog responsible for looking after the interests of Britain's rail passengers, **commissioned research, carried out by Illuminas, to establish what Cross Country rail users want from this franchise**. This original research was funded by the DfT.

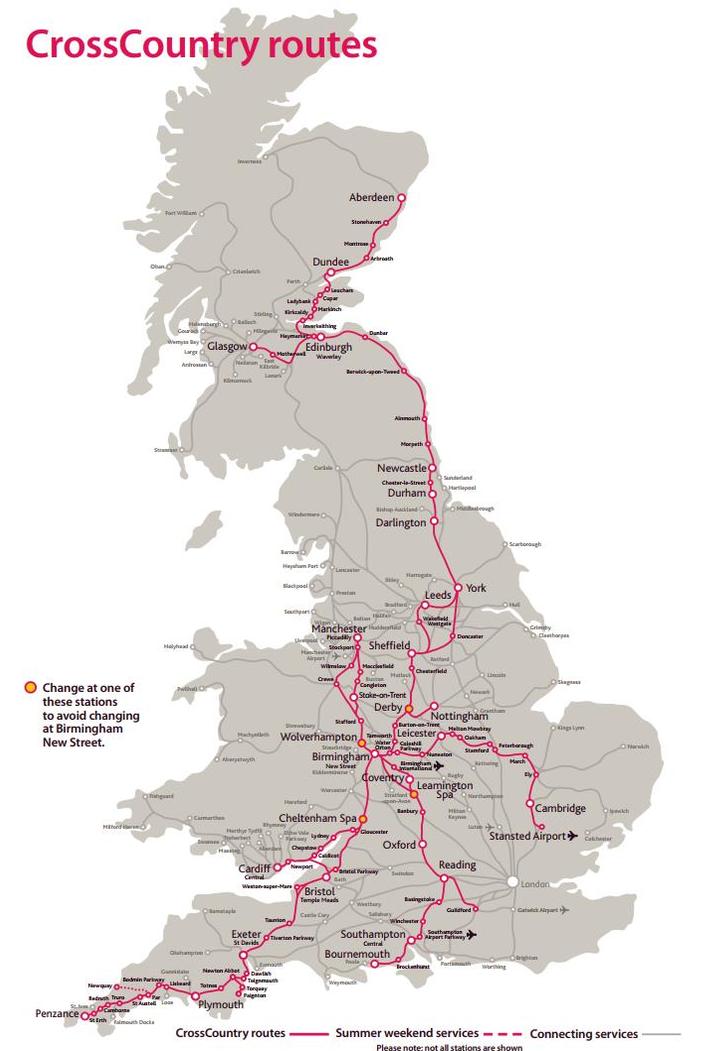
The research was wide in scope, looking at perspectives, experiences and aspirations for the network. Transport Focus was able to use these findings to feed into the negotiation process for the franchise contract.

The need for additional research

The research conducted in 2016 showed that whilst **CrossCountry** was low in profile and lacked a strong relationship with its passengers, the brand **performed well against core expectations**. Passengers considered the CrossCountry service to be relatively well priced for a mid-range brand, despite noting some room for improvements.

However, the DfT and Transport Focus felt that supplementary research was required to examine two areas that were out of scope during the previous round of research: **interchanges** (both with other CrossCountry trains, other TOCs and other transport modes) and **reasons why rail users and other travellers may not use CrossCountry trains**.

This additional work was commissioned by Transport Focus with funding from the DfT.



Research objectives

Research was required to examine two areas that were out of scope during the previous round of research: interchanges (both with other CrossCountry trains, other TOCs and other transport modes) and reasons why rail users and other travellers may not use CrossCountry trains.

Making an interchange on the Cross Country Network

- What rail users **perceive** about interchanges on the Cross Country network
- Rail users' **experiences** of interchanges on the Cross Country network
- How the customer experience of interchanges could be **improved** on the Cross Country Network
- For each of the above points there was an emphasis on investigating **network information, staff and facilities** both on **trains** and at **stations** and also **before** and **during** train journeys
- An **interchange** can be defined as the link between:
 - two CrossCountry trains
 - a CrossCountry train and another train operator
 - CrossCountry trains and other modes of public/private transport

Reasons why passengers and other travellers do not use Cross Country services

- Is this based on **perceptions, experience** or **other factors**?
- This will include consideration of those who deliberately choose **other rail operators** and those who choose **other modes of transport**



Research Method

Qualitative research was undertaken, with interchangers and infrequent users treated independently with distinct methodologies. The research took place in February 2018.

Pre-sensitised teledepth interviews with CrossCountry passengers making an interchange

Rationale:

Teledepths allowed cost-effective coverage of users across the diverse and extensive CrossCountry network, including the variety of interchanges possible with other route options and modes.

The pre-task ensured that respondents were consciously engaged before participating in their interviews, leading to a more informed and engaged interview.

Approach:

- 30 half-hour teledepth interviews with CrossCountry passengers who had an upcoming trip with CrossCountry that involved interchanging
- 10 interchanged with other CrossCountry trains; 10 interchanged with other TOCs; and 10 interchanged with other modes of transport
- Before the teledepth, passengers were required to use ExperienceFellow, an ethnographic app, to document their journey. Paper-based diaries and autographers (hands-free, wearable digital cameras) were also offered to ensure all users could participate
- 5 additional teledepth interviews with disabled passengers

Focus groups with infrequent users

Rationale:

Focus groups are an interactive environment where respondents can build on each other's opinions. The creative, discursive forum generated constructive and considered feedback

Approach:

- Four one-hour 'mini' groups of 5-6 respondents each
- All respondents took regular journeys that could have been taken with CrossCountry but rarely or never took this option
- 5 additional teledepth interviews with disabled transport users

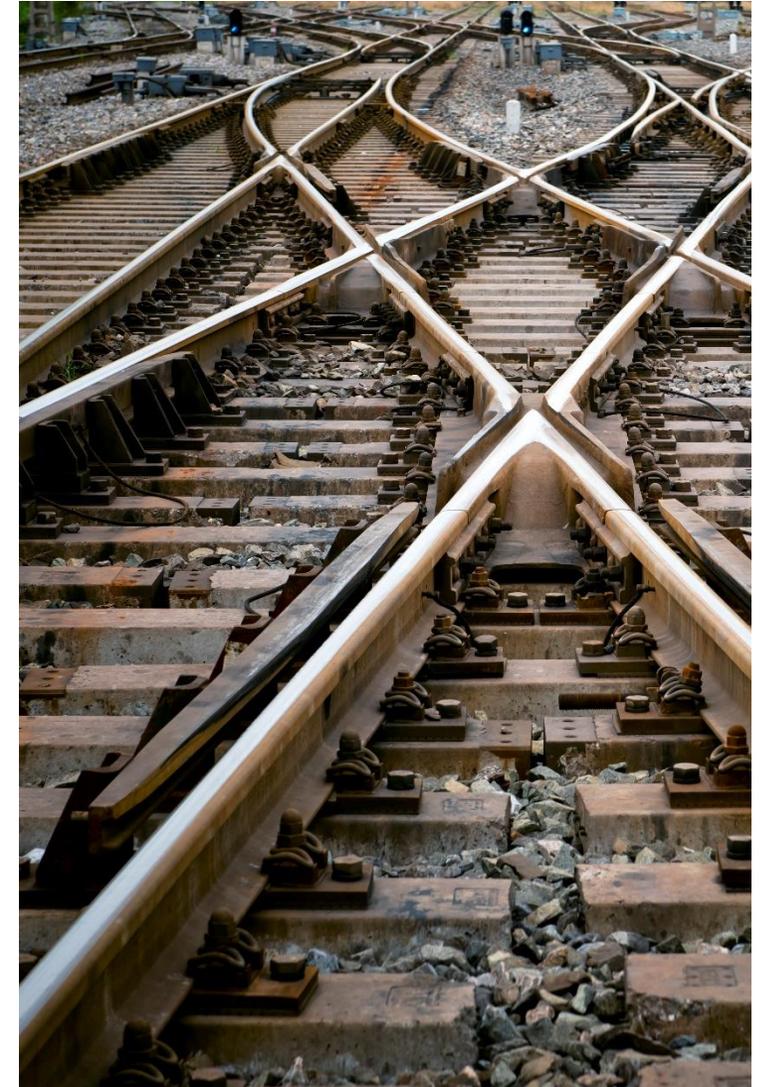
Group number	Location	Journey frequency	Journey purpose	Respondent type
1	Birmingham	Frequent	Commute	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not use Cross Country• Use other train operators instead
2	Birmingham	Infrequent	Leisure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use Cross Country in unusual circumstances• Normally use other transport modes (excluding rail) instead
3	Sheffield	Frequent	Leisure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not use Cross Country• Use other transport modes (excluding rail) instead
4	Sheffield	Infrequent	Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use Cross Country in unusual circumstances• Normally use other train operators instead



Executive summary

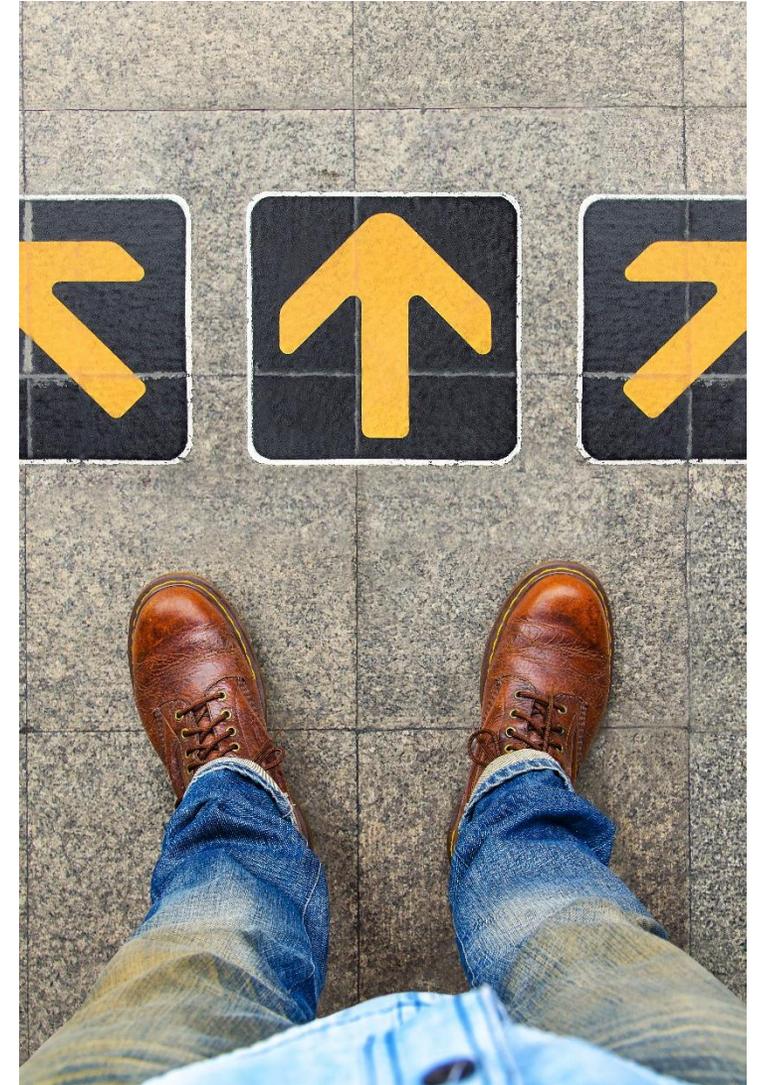
Overview – most infrequent users are unaware of CrossCountry as a brand

- As seen with previous research, there is **limited awareness of the CrossCountry brand**, its routes and the nature of its offer
- However, and encouragingly, amongst those who are aware of the brand, **CrossCountry is generally well regarded**, if not necessarily *preferred or chosen* for a particular route
- Train passengers are **not actively rejecting CrossCountry**:
 - **Lack of awareness** plays the biggest role in non-use: there is limited awareness of routes, destinations and the overall experience offered by the brand
 - There is also limited awareness of the **choice of operators** for a given journey
 - Those that use other TOCs report that that they **would consider the brand** once they have been made aware of it (or *reminded* of it) and its routes, and also once they hear of positive experiences of CrossCountry from users at the group sessions
- For users of other modes, **non-use of CrossCountry is primarily about modal choice but brand salience also plays a role**
 - Modal choices are often based on limited experiences of train travel (within which, uncommon negative experiences can have a lasting impact)
 - Train travel *per se* is seen as risky in terms of what the experience might be like and CrossCountry as a brand is not strong enough to provide sufficient reassurance about these risks
- **Travellers' choices also focus on their destinations and if they wish to use rail to reach places such as London or the South-East , there is no CrossCountry option**



Overview - Interchange

- The interchange process is characterised by **time being a precious commodity**
- This **can be a stressful experience** for passengers as each minute is counted for
- Passengers travelling less frequently are consciously preparing for their interchange on the initial train journey and at the station of interchange
- **Passengers like to be kept updated** throughout their journey and often use smartphones to do so
- Although **passengers making interchanges more frequently are more confident**, even they require information and like to ‘double-check’
- When circumstances out of a passenger's control affects their journey, **passengers require reassurances and a plan of action** (particularly if at the start of the journey before the interchange)
- Passengers have identified a number of **ways in which the stress and anxiety can be taken out of their interchange...**





Research with infrequent users

CrossCountry lacks identity, but so do most operators, with Virgin as an exception



- High awareness
- Credible, high quality brand, reinforced by Virgin presence in other markets
- Mixed experiences but generally positive
- Expensive?

Virgin is very comfortable, its clean, it's almost a treat but it is very expensive
Frequent Commuter, Birmingham



- Limited awareness
- Mixture of experiences, although mostly positive
- No strong rejection, but also little strong endorsement
- Good value?

"East Midlands, they're just fine, aren't they? I've never had any major complaints"
Infrequent leisure, Birmingham



- Limited awareness
- Higher levels of dissatisfaction
- Few positive experiences: seen to offer lower service standards e.g. overcrowding, poor comfort, poor reliability

"I'd call it no frills, its very basic, they're always very packed and not always the cleanest"
Infrequent business, Sheffield



CrossCountry lacks identity, but so do most operators

- CrossCountry fits into a (fairly vaguely defined) **mid-market category**
 - CrossCountry can get lost in this mid-market without a strong identity
- **Unprompted awareness is low.** However, pictures of the logo and the exterior of the rolling stock jog some respondents' memory of actual experiences
 - Few can recall in detail but the absence of any negative associations, the assumption is that it was at least 'ok'
- For others, the **impressions communicated by the images is reassuring, suggesting at least a reasonable experience**
 - But also underlining the lack of a clearly defined CrossCountry identity

"I think CrossCountry are rarely late or delayed"
Infrequent leisure, Birmingham

"I think its all about branding, Virgin just comes across better as a brand"
Infrequent business, Sheffield

"In my opinion, I don't think it really matters what train I take. But they [CrossCountry] should have a bigger presence at stations if they're such a big company"
Infrequent leisure, Birmingham



Reasons for limited use of CrossCountry: rail users of other TOCs

In general, there is limited specific feedback on CrossCountry because it does not stand out amongst other mid-market brands

- Very few passengers **actively select an operator** when planning their journey or booking their tickets
 - TOC is low on the list of considerations as transport users are generally more concerned about other situational factors (e.g. cost, timetabling or journey length) or practical barriers (e.g. planning requirements, parking availability etc.)
 - In addition, when buying tickets, TOC brands are not always obvious to passengers
 - CrossCountry is no exception to other TOCs
- **Frequent rail users** are more aware of brands and *may* choose one operator over another, but TOC is typically a secondary consideration to costs, schedule etc.
- **Infrequent rail users** are less likely to choose one operator over another and are often not aware of which operator they will be travelling with or even that there is a choice
- **Most customers do not feel a particularly strong motivation to choose CrossCountry** as a preferred operator, *but this is the case for the majority of TOCs*
- **Servicing the relevant destination** is a fundamental element when choosing a rail operator

“I have no interest in what train I’m getting on. I want to go to Cardiff, I want to go at this time. It doesn’t matter who the operator is, I’d still get on it

Frequent commuter, Birmingham

“I would prefer to use Virgin, but I use London Midland because the times are better”

Frequent commuter, Birmingham

“I booked a train ticket on the Virgin website and when I got to Birmingham Grand Central station, the board was coming up with lots of stops and I’d booked a London Midland train without realising”

Infrequent leisure, Birmingham

“If I saw CrossCountry, I wouldn't be put off or say, 'I'm not going with them', but they also wouldn't spring to mind at the top of my list either”

Frequent leisure, Sheffield

Reasons for limited use of CrossCountry: rail users (business travellers)

- Choice of TOC can be an even lower salience issue for business travellers
 - Some have travel arranged on their behalf by others in their organisation
 - Convenience (in terms of schedule and elapsed time) are the key factors
 - Cost is rarely a major concern, although it may be difficult to justify an 'excessive' fare
- Train is often a positive choice for business travel:
 - Typically city centre to city centre travel and therefore convenient with no need for onward transport
 - Less stressful than driving
 - Offers the opportunity to work while in transit
 - Often seen as a welcome break from the office routine and a chance to relax, particularly on the return journey (1st class travel not uncommon)
- Passengers do not actively reject CrossCountry
 - With prompting/ stimulus, many believe they may have used CrossCountry and are broadly positive
 - CrossCountry is seen as providing a good 'middle of the road' offer, *as far as they are able to remember the experience*
 - But recall of the detail of the CrossCountry offer is typically very limited

"[Wi-Fi is] free isn't it, I don't have to pay for it"
Frequent leisure, Sheffield

"The Plymouth office is a five minutes' walk from the station, so the train is more convenient than driving through the city centre"
Frequent leisure, Sheffield

"Its just a lot easier sitting on a train compared to my other days at work, so I really look forward to it. If they put us in first class you get the Wi-Fi and you can just sit there, check your emails..."
Infrequent business, Birmingham

"I think I went up to Edinburgh on a CrossCountry train once and yeah I had a comfortable journey"
Infrequent business, Birmingham

Reasons for limited use: rail users (commuters)

- As with Business travellers, commuters typically give little consideration to choice of TOC
 - Indeed, some argue that they essentially have *no* (or at least very little) choice
 - Timing (in terms of both journey length and timetabling) is the key issue
 - Passengers report they are often on 'auto pilot' on familiar journeys and pay little attention to external factors such as the operator
- **Commuting by train is seen as:**
 - Cheaper than driving, or more particularly parking, although not necessarily always seen as 'good value'
 - Quicker than using congested roads
 - Less stressful due to the above issues
 - Given the relatively short journeys made, expectations are fairly modest; reliability being the most important issue
- CrossCountry is considered primarily in the context of longer distance leisure journeys
 - As with other passenger types, the experience of CrossCountry is that it provides a generally good if unremarkable service
 - But again, these respondents struggle to articulate an understanding of what the CrossCountry offer is

"I have no loyalty to which train I go on as long as it goes at that time and I get there"

Frequent Commuter, Birmingham

"You just want comfortable chairs, you know, a table, a plug to plug your laptop in"

Frequent Commuter, Birmingham

"I'd need the best price, rather than having to flip between times of the day to try and make the journey affordable"

Frequent Commuter, Birmingham

Reasons for limited use: infrequent rail users (leisure slide 1/3)

- The majority of these respondents use a car instead of rail for most journeys
 - Typically within an hour or two driving distance
 - For longer journeys (especially to London) train may be considered and then choice is contingent on operators serving the required destination
- Car is the default option and is seen as providing numerous advantages:
 - Door to door experience (especially important if visiting more remote locations)
 - Safe and secure (in relation to other people and in terms of one's belongings)
 - Comfortable (no exposure to the elements)
 - Autonomy and control (enjoying one's own space and ability to make one's own decisions e.g. on timing of trips, routes, dealing with disruption etc.)
 - Cost-effective, especially if journey costs shared with others. (Although some concede that they may not make a full evaluation of total cost of motoring).
 - Seamless i.e. no interchange
 - Capacity for passengers, luggage, shopping etc.

"If I was just going to Manchester then I'd probably drive but if I was going to London, its a much longer journey so I'd probably take the train"

Infrequent leisure, Birmingham

"I wouldn't like to take the bus at this time of night, it's also just more convenient to jump in the car isn't it?"

Frequent leisure, Sheffield

I would prefer to take my car only, purely, because it's down to me then what time I leave. I'm not restricted

Frequent leisure, Sheffield

"If its just you going, the train may be cheaper, but if you've got to pay for two, three, four people, you may as well drive

Infrequent leisure, Birmingham

Reasons for limited use: infrequent rail users (leisure slide 2/3)

- Non use of CrossCountry is **primarily about generic barriers to train use *per se***
- There are no particular concerns regarding CrossCountry and indeed, these respondents typically have very limited awareness of any TOC brand, with the limited exception of Virgin
- However, barriers to train travel exist at two levels:

Trains are difficult to use

- Fares are complicated
- Timetables are inconvenient (especially late at night)
- Interchanges can be complex/ stressful
- Getting to/ from stations can be complicated and expensive (e.g. lack of public transport links, limited parking, parking costs, taxis, etc.)

The train experience can be unpredictable and is often unpleasant

- Expensive (particularly in comparison to group travel by car where costs can be shared)
- Unreliable
- Overcrowded
- Subject to antisocial behaviour
- Uncomfortable (dirty, too hot/ cold, unpleasant toilets etc.)

“The prices can be so confusing, it should just be, you know, I want to go there, and that’s the price”

Infrequent leisure, Birmingham

“You have to pay for the car parking in the train station, then you have to pay for tickets for myself and obviously my partner and the two kids. So it’s just cheaper to drive”

Infrequent leisure, Birmingham

“The train can just be over-crowded, in my car I can just be in my own space”

Frequent leisure, Sheffield

Reasons for limited use: infrequent rail users (leisure slide 3/3)

- Beliefs about train travel endure despite the fact that some ‘infrequent users’ of rail **have experienced enjoyable train journeys** (typically longer distance leisure trips)
- But even rare negative **experiences appear to have quite profound effects that are reinforced by hearsay and negative media coverage**
- **Fundamentally, non users do not know enough about train travel to feel confident about what they may potentially be buying**
 - Will there be seats?
 - Will there be delays?
 - Will Wi-Fi ,toilets, plugs, or storage space be provided?
 - Will the train be old and worn or will it be warm and comfortable?
 - Will I be able to interchange in time?
- Interestingly, when shown an image of a CrossCountry train, this is reassuring, suggesting at the very least a reasonable experience, but infrequent users do not know how to select this type of experience and fear that that they may experience something much worse

Normally you're in a rush, you know you've got five minutes and you get there and the train's delayed and you're trying to find out what's going on... It's never a relaxing situation
Frequent leisure, Sheffield

“Unless you're in First Class, you have to pay for Wi-Fi and I just think in this day and age you would expect free Wi-Fi”
Infrequent leisure, Birmingham

“Can they guarantee you a seat? I don't think they can, can they?”
Infrequent leisure, Birmingham

“You don't know, do you, you don't know what could go wrong”
Infrequent leisure, Birmingham

Disabled people choose train operators for the same reasons as other passengers

- Similarly to other rail users, disabled passengers **do not always actively select an operator** when booking their train tickets but focus more on cost and timetabling
- Disabled passengers **will largely opt for a direct service where possible**, to avoid the practical challenges involved in interchanging
- Disabled passengers who use the transport network frequently may be more aware of brands and use one operator over another. If a passenger has had a positive experience using one train operator, they are **more likely to travel with them again** in order to guarantee as **smooth a journey** as possible
- Passengers may choose an operator who provides **greater comfort and space** to keep luggage/medical equipment
- Disabled people may choose the car over the train **to avoid encountering problems** such as overcrowding at stations, which can make a journey even more stressful

I'm not particularly concerned by brand, I just want to get there as quickly as possible, with as few problems as possible
Leisure, Bristol

I travel by car when I can, I hate how crowded New Street can be
Leisure, Birmingham

Perceptions of assistance services

- Few disabled passengers are aware of the assistance service provided by any TOC, and this trend is also true for CrossCountry
- Assistance is often thought of and judged on interactions with staff, which CrossCountry is seen as performing well on
- However there is some concern about the lack of staff visibility at stations

Specific needs

- CrossCountry rolling stock is perceived as spacious and this is a real plus for many disabled passengers requiring priority seating etc.
- CrossCountry, like other TOCs on the entire network, can put in many practical measures to remove barriers for disabled passengers and support their journeys emotionally with a greater presence of trained staff



Research
regarding
interchanges

Frequent interchanges made by our respondents on the CrossCountry network

Birmingham New Street

Leeds

York

Nottingham

Derby

Sheffield

Bristol

Leicester

Cheltenham Spa

Wolverhampton

Hinkley

Narborough

Edinburgh

Stansted

Smaller stations can prove inconvenient interchange points for some

– Less staff and amenities

However...

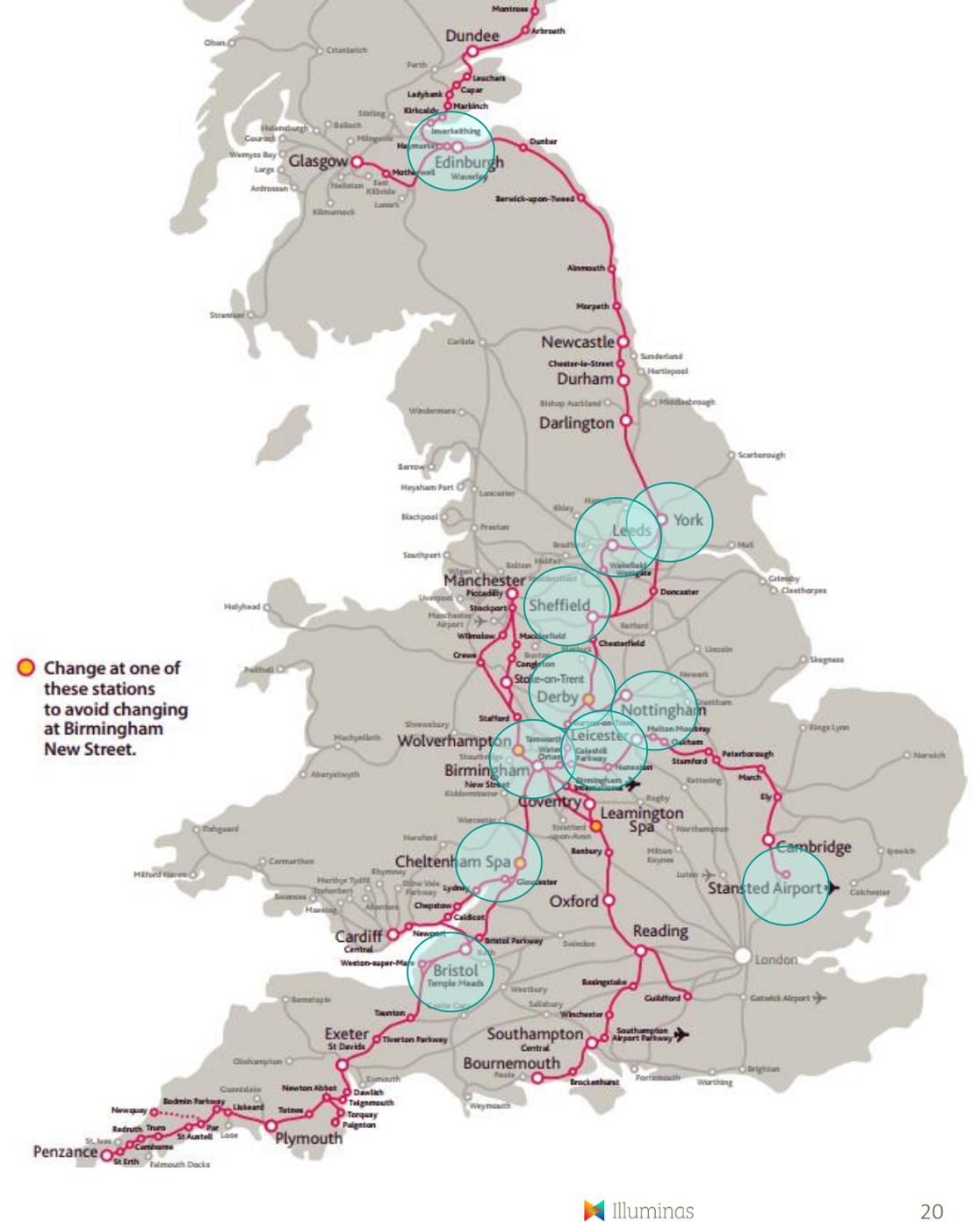
– Interchange may be easier to navigate

When planning a journey, some passengers would rather interchange at a bigger station

– If passengers need to wait around, there is an option for refreshments and other amenities

Those interchanging at Birmingham New Street were aware of alternative interchange points at Wolverhampton etc.

– Message was communicated clearly, but many see these alternative interchange points as inconvenient





Key challenges
to interchange

Interchanging can be a high-stress and emotional experience for some passengers

When interchanging is not a 'habitual' behaviour, cognition is usually heightened along with stress levels

Circumstances that are unexpected (big and small) can panic passengers

Big

- Delayed and cancelled trains
- Getting lost
- Personal delays (e.g. having to take a phone call)

Smaller

- Overcrowded stations at peak times
- Amenities closed (toilets, refreshments)
- Making a wrong turn
- Children's needs

Even if they are not likely to cause major disruptions to a journey...

"I was in New Street and I had some time to catch my train, but then there was this big commotion and this big film crew where I was trying to look for where to get my train... I panicked. People were just standing there and I couldn't get round them."

Leisure, Birmingham New Street

Seen as a task that they should be prepared for and ready to expend energy on

- The literal speed in which passengers move is taken into account and they can feel responsible themselves if they have missed their interchange

"I'm at the interchange station and perhaps I miss the train by two minutes, meaning I have to spend £50 on a last minute train. I can't afford to miss it because I haven't walked fast enough!"

Leisure, Cheltenham Spa

Passengers can become angry and frustrated at 'using up' energy at the interchange stage, as they are not actually 'moving' anywhere

- Spent energy at this stage seems like a thankless task

For others, usually regular interchangers, transferring from one train to another is easy

- But they still check regularly for any changes to travel arrangements as it is recognised that their train will not *always* leave from the same platform
- They can also become frustrated by 'dawdling passengers'

A number of factors can make interchanging particularly challenging

Delays on first part of journey

- Increases anxiety and stress throughout rest of journey
- Passenger already behind schedule

Amount of time for interchange

- Frequent travellers want shorter window (15 mins)
- Infrequent want larger window to find onward travel

Needing to meet a commitment (e.g. work meeting)

- *Having* to be at a destination at a certain time can heighten stress for passengers making interchanges because if the interchange is missed, the consequences can be severe

“If it’s late at night and my train is already late then there is a rush and being in Derby late at night I can get a bit panicked”

Business, Derby

An expensive ticket

- If the passenger deems their ticket to be expensive, the consequence(s) of missing that interchange become financially detrimental
- Passengers can become frustrated if the interchange is missed, especially if this was not their own fault

Changing at a new station

- Passengers can become concerned that they will get lost and not find the necessary platform to catch their connection

“It can be very stressful at rush hour, because there’s all these people, and many of them are dawdling! It’s the people that don’t know where they’re going”

Commuter, Nottingham

Overcrowded stations

- All passengers (frequent and infrequent travellers) find overcrowded stations difficult
- Frequent travellers become frustrated that they cannot reach their interchange quickly, often compromising their ‘travel routines’ and formulas for ‘getting a seat’
- Whereas infrequent travellers can become intimidated by large crowds and become uneasy and unsure about reaching their interchange on time

Travelling with a child

- Can be a stressful scenario for passengers as ability to meet deadlines quickly is limited

“If I’ve got the little one then it’s different because she does tend to slow things down a bit!”

Leisure, Birmingham New Street

Passengers do not have any strong feelings towards CrossCountry and feel broadly positive

Much like infrequent users, passengers have less of an opinion on CrossCountry than they do on perceived better and worse TOCs

- CrossCountry seen as slightly less visible at stations
- When staff are approached they are perceived as helpful

Interchange passengers most likely to compare CrossCountry to Virgin and their local TOC

- Seen as having a lack of identity compared to TOCs such as Virgin



CrossCountry still perceived to be:

- Punctual
- Spacious
- Friendly
- Clean
- Trustworthy
- Cheaper than Virgin

“They’re quite reliable I suppose. Never had any problems but they’ve also never surprised me”

Business, Birmingham New Street

“There is the odd delay, I’m talking maybe one or two. But I’ll allow that.”

Commuter, Nottingham



“I see CrossCountry as a brand that I trust, I can rely on them and I know they’re going to get me where I need to go.”

Commuter, Leeds



Interchange
experience

Passengers often receive a plan for their interchange at the booking process, and many keep track of their journey status through live feeds on digital devices

Many journeys are booked in advance and this process often delivers a ready made plan for a passenger's interchange

- Emails delivered to passengers from comparison sites (e.g. Trainline, National Rail etc.) detail train times and interchange points
- Purchasing tickets in advance can provide passengers with platform information
- And if passengers know the platform number in advance, the interchange process can be smooth

Regular travellers are often on 'auto-pilot', but still recognise the need to 'always check' platforms

- Commuters travelling daily, know where they are going, but recognise that platforms can alter on the rare occasion

"It's always the same platform, but I do still check the app everyday."

Commuter, Nottingham

Some passengers use apps for online 'live' updates on their interchange:

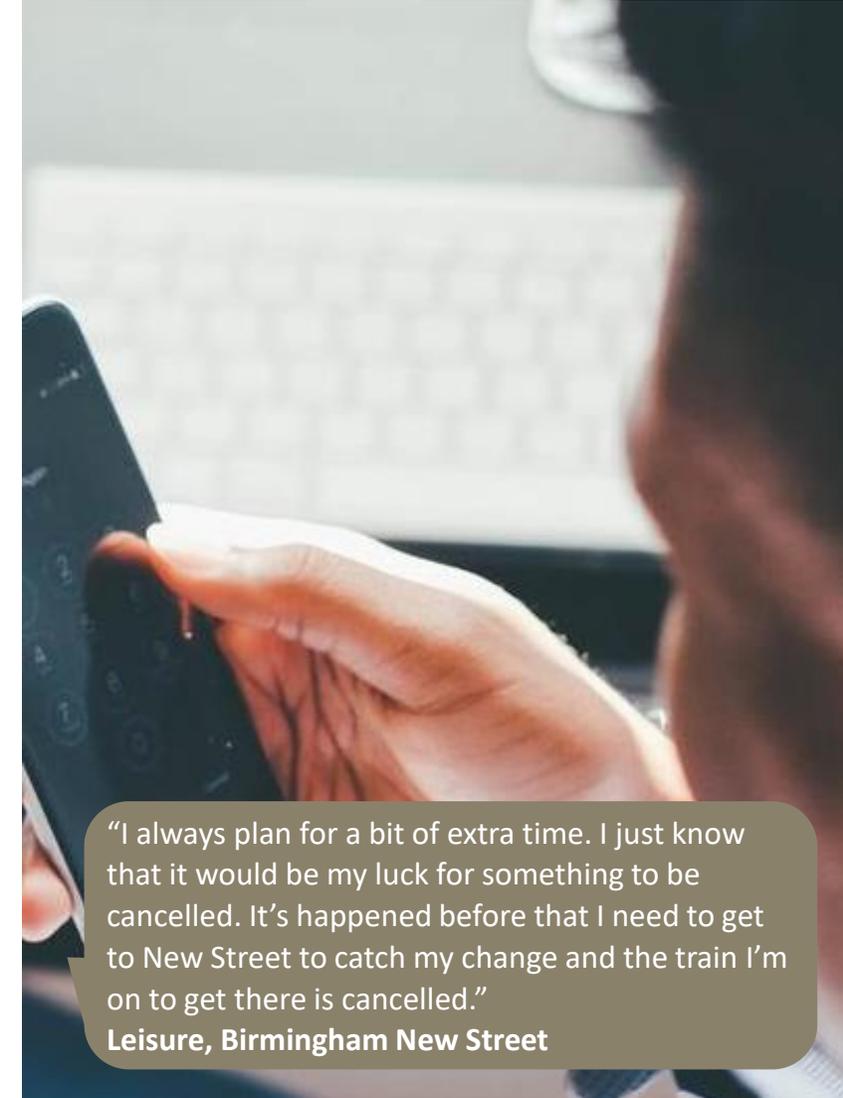
- Apps are often used on first leg of journey to check the status of interchange train
- 'Live journey feeds' are used (National Rail and CrossCountry apps)

Live journey feeds provide:

- Platform information
- Arrival times
- Any delays to services

Many passengers plan for 'extra time' in case of complications (e.g. cancelled trains and delays)

- Those travelling more frequently tend to allow less time for an interchange (but still at least 15 minutes)
- Leads to many passengers needing to 'wait around' in the station



"I always plan for a bit of extra time. I just know that it would be my luck for something to be cancelled. It's happened before that I need to get to New Street to catch my change and the train I'm on to get there is cancelled."

Leisure, Birmingham New Street

Passengers tend to buy one ticket that covers their whole journey

Passengers have tickets in varying formats:

- Paper ticket
- E-ticket
- Ticket on smart phone

Some passengers use their confirmation emails as journey guides

- An e-ticket or email sent to them by a TOC or comparison site can show passengers where and when to change

Those that are collecting their tickets from ticket machines can find the process stressful

- A small number of ticket machines can panic passengers, particularly if queues are long and interchange time is short
- Ticket machines can be confusing
- A few passengers are not sure whether they can print off CrossCountry tickets from other TOC ticket machines

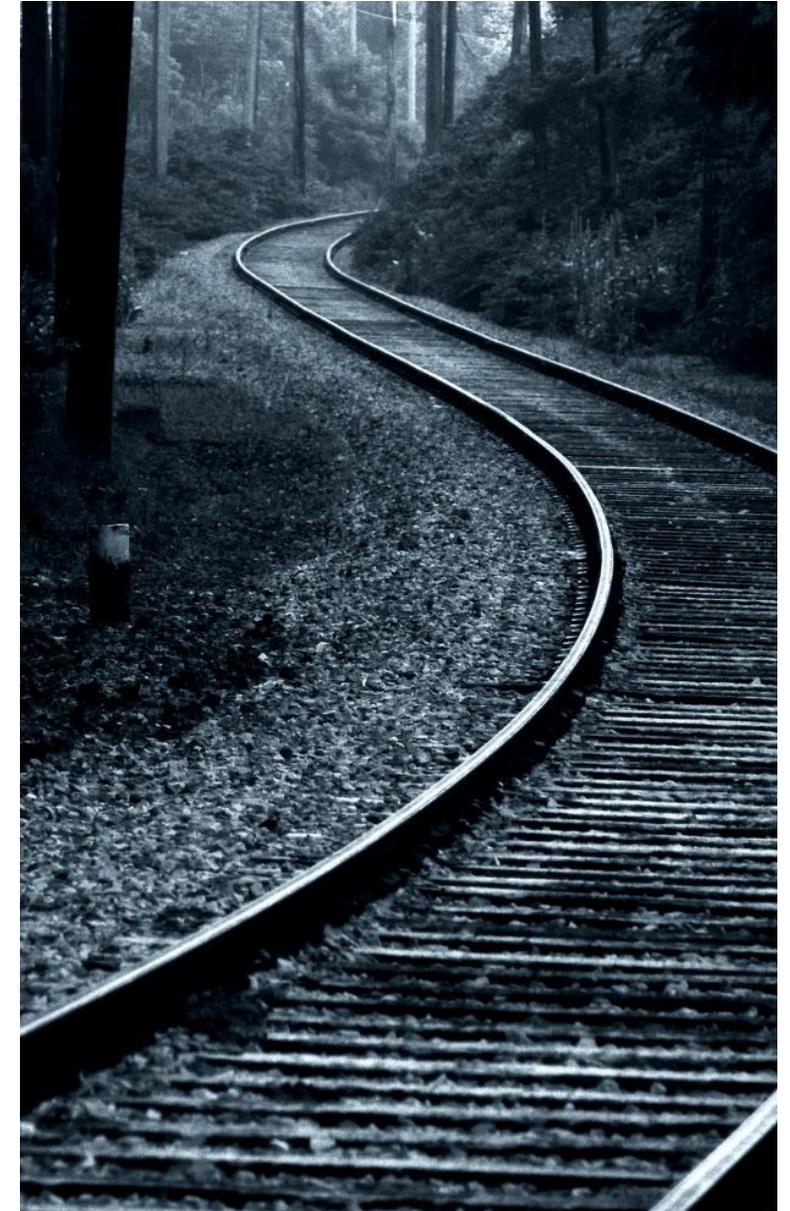
Those that have tickets on their phone, or have confirmation codes on their phone, can become anxious if phone battery runs out or the station has no Wi-Fi

There are some concerns that tickets do not give you all the interchange information

- Those that have one ticket for the whole leg of the journey do not receive interchange details on their ticket
- Instead passengers must check confirmation email or live journey feeds
- However if this information channel is cut off (battery/Wi-Fi), passengers can become stuck

"I'm often using my mobile data, and the station Wi-Fi is usually impossible to get on. So for checking my train times I want to see that on the ticket."

Leisure, Birmingham New Street



For many, being on the train before the interchange can be a process of preparing to alight as efficiently and quickly as possible with resources charged and intact

Passengers may adjust their behaviour if their journey before the interchange is a short one

- For example, passengers may not read, work or eat on the train if they need to prepare for an interchange
- Regular travellers often do not make any major adjustments

Some passengers board train early, when possible, so that they can be comfortably positioned and ready to alight again

- A well thought-out process, particularly if responsible for children and/or luggage
- If the interchange station is not the second trains' first stop, passengers will have to wait on the platform rather than on-board the train and this can sometimes be a more uncomfortable experience

Shortly before the train pulls in to the interchange station, passengers prepare to alight

- Again, for many this is a well thought-out process, particularly if responsible for children and/or luggage
- Luggage in-hand and stand by door

Keeping phone battery 'alive'

- Smart phones can be a valuable source of information when interchanging
- There are concerns that if phone battery is used up on first leg of journey then interchange becomes more challenging
- Prompts need for plugs on all rolling stock

Passengers require information and announcements as their train pulls in to interchange station

"I know I'm only going to be on the train for 30 minutes and then I have to get off to get my connection, I can't really settle, half an hour isn't long enough to relax"

Leisure, Nottingham

"My battery was nearly dead because my kids were watching YouTube videos on the way, and then by the time I need to change I've got barely any battery left and that's what I use for my live journey feed"

Leisure, Birmingham New Street



A passenger's experience of the interchange station depends on a number of key factors

Station size

- Larger stations are more difficult to navigate and find point of interchange departure
- Whereas smaller stations are easier to navigate as platform options are fewer

However...

- Larger stations seen to have more available amenities and 'things to do' whilst passengers wait for their interchange, and more seating
- Smaller stations typically seen as **lacking** amenities, weather proofing and less secure

"You find where you're going and the platform can be the furthest away from you. And there's more crowds"

Commuter, Derby

How busy the station is

When stations are particularly busy, passengers...

- Can become disorientated
- Find it hard to see directions of where to go
- Unable to view information boards
- Become stressed and therefore less able to think calmly and rationally about next steps to complete interchange
- Have difficulties spotting 'visible staff' to ask for help

"Leicester can be completely full and overflowing, especially the time I get there at around 5ish or 6ish"

Commuter, Leicester

Lighting levels

- Dimly lit stations (or areas of stations) can limit visibility of information sources
- This can be especially problematic if the passenger needs information quickly
- Seeking out information in poorly lit stations can take up vital minutes in a passenger's interchange experience
- A problem often experienced in sub-surface station areas, such as at Birmingham New Street

Case Study - Birmingham New Street

Underground platforms at Birmingham New Street are poorly lit, meaning that some passengers struggle to see platform information

Availability of information

- A proportionately high number and variety of information boards are required
- Main boards in station foyers, as well as smaller information boards by platforms and amenities
 - Information boards must be clear about what they are providing

Leeds – Case Study

Leeds station cited as example of a station having an array of information around departures prompting anxiety as to which source to consult as to "best" travel option

"I do find the array of information boards on the concourse at Leeds to be a little confusing. You know, next train to destination by alphabet vs. latest departures"

Business, Leeds

Passengers want concise, correct and *relevant* communications for their interchanges

Faulty communications can cause passengers to miss trains

- False information seen as a cause for missed trains
- To some extent, there is paranoia regarding what the correct information is at stations
- Announcements do not always tell passengers quickest route for onward journey (does not filter and give options like a comparison site would)
- Some faulty information boards reported in Birmingham New Street

Communications needed particularly in times of disruption

- When trains are running late, or services have been cancelled, passengers require that information in a clear and simple way as soon as possible

A lack of communications can leave passengers confused

- Lack of announcements on-board trains, in stations and at platforms
- Lack of communication particularly at less busy, off-peak times
- Also if a passenger's destination is not the terminus, it can be difficult to find onward travel

Large amounts of 'unnecessary information' at stations seen as distracting from what passengers need to see in that short period of time during interchange

- E.g. adverts, refreshment areas etc.

"There's all sorts of stuff nowadays in the station. You've got adverts and food shops and all the rest. Why can't they just tell me what I need to know?"
Leisure, Birmingham New Street

At larger stations, double boards (arrival and departure boards) can be confusing for passengers

- This is also alongside lists of stations and next available trains
- Information overload

Many passengers see a need for a visual aid as well as an announcements

- Some passengers feel that they are likely to miss announcements due to the background noise of stations
- Some passengers like to travel with headphones in playing music or podcasts

"Most of the time I've got my headphones in. I like to have a soundtrack to my journey. But the thing is I'll then miss an announcement. So a visual display would be good"

Commuter, Leicester

Platforms can be uncomfortable and confusing places to wait and interchange

Platform alterations can be problematic for passengers, particularly at big stations

- Reports of alterations at Birmingham New Street particularly difficult due to the need to travel back up across the station
- A particular challenge with luggage and/or children

Platforms can be uncomfortable places for passengers to wait

- Some cold and dark
- Often depends on the weather if outside
- Lack of waiting rooms/shelter

Knowing *where* to get on the train with reserved tickets can be difficult

- Some platforms show signage (mostly Virgin platforms)
- Whereas some platforms do not

Passengers travelling regularly can find that a change of platform at interchange (compared to normal platform) can be disconcerting

- A different starting point for their interchange
- Can be inconvenient if passenger needs onward travel (e.g. to catch a bus) as they can be disorientated as where to go

Length of platform is weighed up by passengers

- Passengers often wonder where to place themselves
- Trade offs made between access to information and optimum boarding position for comfortable onward journey
- Competitive environment

“Being on the platform often just depends on the weather, right now it’s cold which is not so nice”

Commuter, Nottingham

Signs for stations on platforms are often not lit up

- This can leave passengers confused as to which station they are at when their train pulls in, particularly in the dark

“If I’m pulling into Hinkley late at night I can’t actually tell it’s Hinkley. I can’t see the area around the station because it’s dark, I can’t see the signs and I might have nodded off on the train so don’t know where I am”

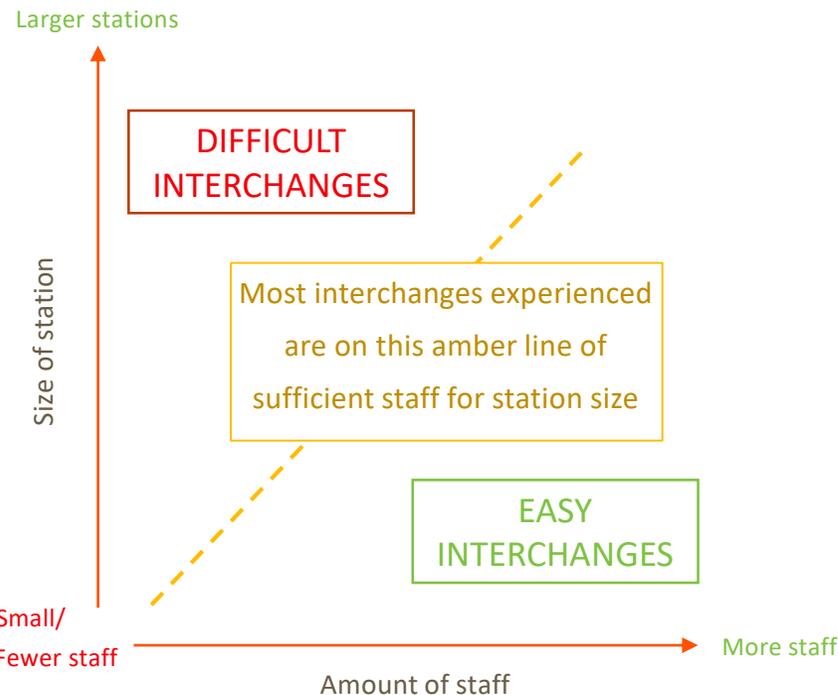
Leisure, Hinkley



The need for help from staff at stations is covered either by the amount of staff visible or size of the station

The smaller the station the less staff is needed, because the interchange is more simple

Whereas the larger the station, the more staff is needed because the interchange is more complex



However, at large stations (e.g. Birmingham New Street) staff from other TOCs are present, reassuring passengers when they initially begin their interchange

Nonetheless, CrossCountry passengers find that staff members belonging to other TOCs are less knowledgeable or helpful regarding their queries for the CrossCountry service



Passengers do not see the solution as being introducing CrossCountry staff, rather existing station staff having the knowledge and *will* to assist passengers making CrossCountry interchanges/journeys

The visibility of staff members belonging to other TOCs also tends to vary

- Virgin highly visible
- CrossCountry staff not visible at Leeds
- TransPennine Express not visible
- Reports that CrossCountry staff are more visible at Birmingham New Street, particularly on platforms

The positioning of staff can be inconsistent and unhelpful

- Some staff members 'hide' and are not visible
- Staff members can be the other side of the barriers to the passengers, meaning help can't be accessed
- Passengers often unsure of CrossCountry branding, therefore unsure of staff uniforms

Anxiety can be increased if staff do not know when a passenger's next train will be arriving

"I always seem to get an I don't know answer"
Business, Leeds

Boarding the second train after interchange can sometimes be disappointing

The contrast between boarding and alighting rolling stock of differing quality can frustrate passengers

- CrossCountry rolling stock is seen as neither high end nor low end

Boarding a CrossCountry train after alighting from a Virgin train can be a disappointing experience due to the perceived gulf in rolling stock quality

Alternatively, boarding a CrossCountry train from a London Midland train gives CrossCountry rolling stock a higher end appearance

-  London Midland – cold, basic with little leg room
-  Greater comfort in terms of seating and level of warmth and fit out of carriage

Passengers can become concerned about overcrowding when boarding an interchange train

- Particularly if the train they are boarding has tickets at a good price point
- Assumption that many other passengers will try and board the same train due to ‘good value’ tickets
- Overcrowding also dependent on time of day off-peak vs. peak
- Popularity of end destination
- Frequency of services
- Number of carriages

Regular travellers that ‘know the ropes’, will time their journeys in order to ensure they get a seat on the second interchange

- Also know the optimum place on the train to board for maximise comfort

“Voyagers are good. CrossCountry are always clean and tidy they never look shabby or unloved like the HST’s.”

Business, Leeds/Sheffield/Peterborough

“CrossCountry it was late, it was on time and when it turned up there were only four carriages, not enough for the people”

Business, Leeds/Sheffield/Peterborough

“I always allow 20 minutes, that’s my standard. I’m only crossing from platform 12 to 13 so it’s literally just across the platform. But I actually prefer to get on the train earlier, get a decent seat. The earlier you get there the better chance you get a good seat”.

Business, Cheltenham

Delays and disruption

Some passengers *accept* that trains may be delayed, and therefore do not take the *risk* in planning and interchange

- Instead, those passengers book one journey from starting station to interchange station, and then purchase a **separate** ticket from interchange station onwards
- Some passengers are convinced that the train is *always* late - therefore a planned interchange is always ruled out
- These passengers often envisage a worst case scenario

A particular concern for passengers travelling on Northern services

- Some passengers often experience delays of 10-15 minutes, meaning there is often a risk of not catching a CrossCountry train

Even regular travellers often allow excess time for an interchange

- Even for those only ‘crossing the platform’, time is allowed to allow for cancellations or delays

Delays and disruption are not only caused by trains...

- A slow service at any refreshment point or toilet can delay a passenger during an interchange process
- Faulty ticket machines, or slow services at ticket offices
- Needing to use toilets and refreshments themselves can delay a passenger’s interchange
- Children’s needs often delay movement across a station interchanging (dropping things etc.)

“Staff were really helpful for me. My train was cancelled which annoyed me. So I went back to the station and asked the CrossCountry staff where I should go. They told me via Leicester and I got there. It was still frustrating but I was just happy I got there”

Business, Nottingham

“I need enough time when I get to the [interchange] station to print my tickets off”

Business, Cheltenham

“I travel everyday and I just have to cross the platform, so I know that it takes less than 10 seconds to do that. But everyday I leave 15 minutes because I know that one day my train might be late, and then I might miss my meeting with a client.”

Commuter, Nottingham

Interchanges are looked forward to in some contexts

Some passengers find the initial leg of their journey difficult, particularly if on a lower end TOC

First legs of journeys can be overcrowded and uncomfortable

- In this scenario passengers look forward to their interchange and look forward to different rolling stock

Leisure passengers also look forward to an opportunity to purchase substantial refreshments, at what is perceived to be a more affordable price at larger stations

- These passengers are typically making long leisure or business journeys without a significant time pressure and with a long interchange time

A minority of passengers would like the opportunity to exit the station of interchange and smoke, eat or drink

- Usually long leisure trips with a large interchange time
- Pubs inside a station seen as a solution to this





Interchanging
for disabled
passengers

For many disabled CrossCountry passengers, interchanging is a stressful experience to be avoided at all costs

Limited time

- Interchanging can take up a huge amount of a disabled passenger's energy, especially if a long distance has to be travelled to make the connection
- Some disabled passengers feel that there isn't always enough time to make connections
- Interchanges are planned well in advance; some disabled users accept they will need to take a later train to avoid the rush of making the next to leave service

Accessibility

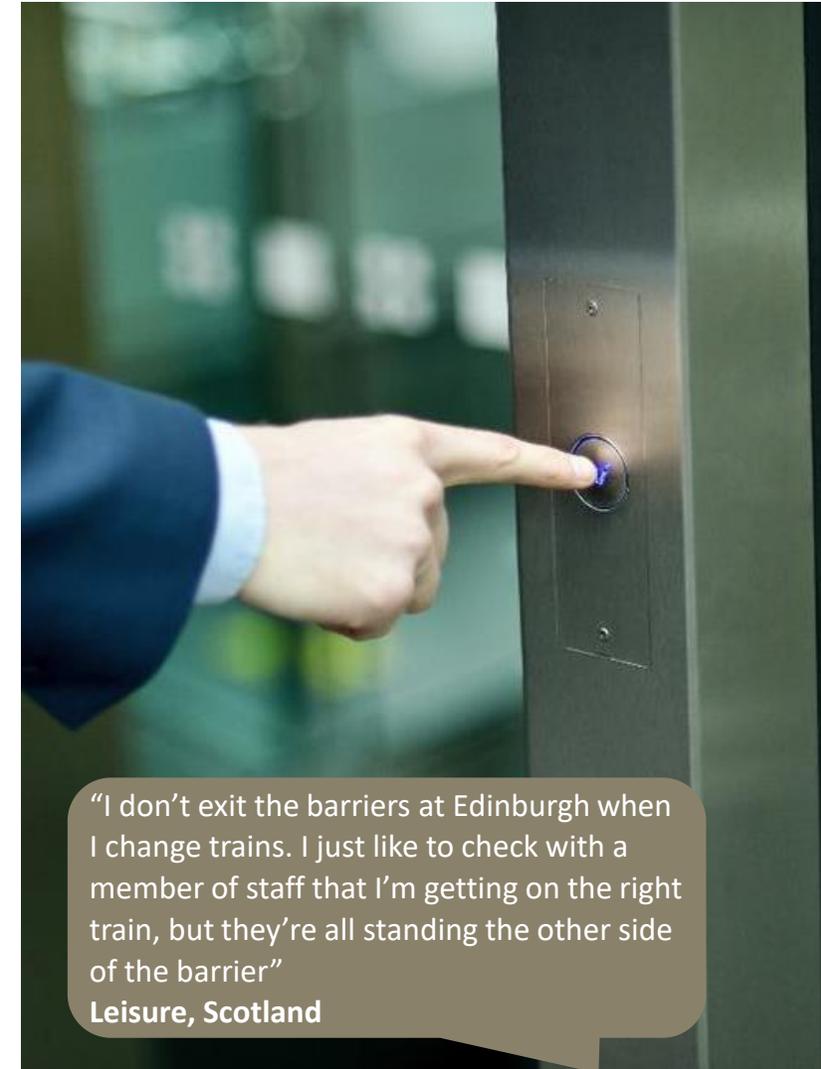
- Some of our respondents would book assistance services in advance: some would not
- Interchangers with mobility impairments worry whether they will be able to make their way across the station if there are no ramps/lifts at the interchange station
- Vast stations, such as Birmingham New Street, are difficult to cross without assistance for those with mobility impairments

Availability of CrossCountry staff

- CrossCountry staff are not always visible/accessible at interchange stations, leading disabled passengers to ask fellow passengers for help
- Some interchanges are within the barriers, yet staff are often at the other side of the barriers. This can heighten any anxieties disabled passengers already had about interchanging
- Staff needed to provide reassurance for passengers with some hidden disabilities; a lack of information makes the whole journey more stressful

Some passengers with cognitive impairments struggle with having a 'hidden disability', meaning that their needs are not always noticed or met by staff and passengers

It is for these reasons that passengers will choose a direct service over one that involves an interchange, even if the journey takes longer



"I don't exit the barriers at Edinburgh when I change trains. I just like to check with a member of staff that I'm getting on the right train, but they're all standing the other side of the barrier"
Leisure, Scotland

Accessibility across the network can be improved tremendously; CrossCountry aren't leading the field, but could make a few steps to do so

CrossCountry are largely seen as better than a number of their competitors (Northern, London Midland, Scotrail) in terms of help/assistance provided to disabled passengers when interchanging. However, there are many things CrossCountry could do to become leaders in the field, including promoting passenger assistance services (including Passenger Assist scheme)

Priority seating

- Provide more priority seating for a range of disabled passengers on board the train
- Dedicated seating only for disabled passengers to avoid not knowing which passengers should sit in priority seating first
- Sufficient seating at interchange station if disabled person has chosen a longer interchange period

Alighting

- Passenger assistance to help disabled users alight the train and ensure they make their connection to the next train on time, with limited stress

Announcements

- Ensure signage/announcements such as platform information are clearly visible and given in plenty of time; helpful if announcements are given on the train as well as in the station
- More information regarding station stops and facilities available to disabled passengers
- If there are delays and connection is missed, information as to when next train is available

Visible staff

- Ensure staff are on hand to help with any form of assistance during times of uncertainty - from providing platform information, to assistance boarding the train





Conclusions

Passengers have identified a number of priority areas for improving their interchange experience

Multiple communications regarding interchange available throughout a passenger's end to end journey

- Keep passengers updated on their journey through multiple channels (not just apps), including announcements, visual aids and visible staff members
- Passengers have identified their tickets as a way to map out their interchange
- Visual and audio aids on first leg of journey regarding interchange

Limit time consuming obstacles that passengers may face during interchange process

- Means to quickly move with children and heavy luggage
- Adequate information at unfamiliar stations
- Limit overcrowding in station and on platforms at peak times

Keep passenger resources available, visible and charged

- Plugs and Wi-Fi on trains and at stations to charge phones and connect
- Visible and *knowledgeable* staff on first leg of train, at stations and on platforms

There is a great deal of practical support that disabled passengers require to make interchanging an accessible process

Passengers feel that their journey would be less stressful and energy consuming if these key areas were focused on

“I think information on the tickets would give me something to focus on, other than just my phone, which could actually ruin out of battery or wi-fi at any moment.”

Leisure, Birmingham New Street



For infrequent users, CrossCountry should focus on communicating their offer clearly

Passengers using other TOCs

Awareness and knowledge of CrossCountry and their offer is low

- Passengers often remember TOCs that are perceived to be higher level (Virgin), as well as lower level (Northern)

CrossCountry would benefit from a clear message about what the TOC offers, including:

- What offers are available
- The quality of rolling stock
- Speed of journeys
- Destinations on offer
- Any competitive price packages

This will allow passengers to exercise a *brand choice*

- Currently passengers do not have the knowledge and/or awareness of CrossCountry to do so

Non rail users

Rather than rejecting CrossCountry, passengers are rejecting the category of train travel per se

- This is not specific to any TOC in particular

The strongest barrier to potential passengers using rail travel is the perceived risk involved in doing so

- What if I have a bad experience?
- What if I don't get value for money?
- What if the train is late or doesn't turn up at all?

Passengers are used to their own tried and tested methods of transport

CrossCountry can overcome this barrier by communicating their brand as a risk reducer in a tangible and reassuring manner

- Quality rolling stock, on-time etc.





Appendix: station experiences and feedback on journeys

Case studies

Birmingham New Street - Case Study

Underground platforms at Birmingham New Street are poorly lit, meaning that some passengers struggle to see platform information as well as signage to other platforms

Leeds – Case Study

Leeds station cited as example of a station having an array of information around departures prompting anxiety as to which source to consult as to “best” travel option

Hinkley – Case Study

Hinkley station is considered too dark on the platforms. When passengers arrive on trains they can struggle to see signs for Hinkley station and can either fail to alight in time or have to rush off of the train

Derby – Case Study

Late at night, Derby is seen as an empty station. This can leave passengers feeling insecure and unable to get any help from staff should they encounter a problem (e.g. a missed train)

Leamington Spa – Case Study

Staff at Leamington Spa are said to be very helpful for disabled passengers. Key criteria was met, including friendly nature and ability to adapt and be flexible to disabled passengers’ needs.

Sheffield – Case Study

Useful and prompt announcements in Sheffield station, as well as on delayed trains pulling into the station. Also a large staff presence for any additional information needs.



ExperienceFellow Feedback (slide 1/7)

Planning the journey & availability of information

“Rather easy, the cross country trains website was quite simple to negotiate - the best deals were highlighted in red and it was the price which determined which train I booked. Clearly formatted so that I could get my ticket. I used the google maps app on my iPhone to plan how we would reach the final destination”

“National rail website was good though clunky and didn't always work on phone”

“Planned it via trainline, got precise times with minimal wait at the change. Also by catching a certain train got it at half price”

Travelling to/from stations

“Taxi arrived on time and dropped me at the station in good time”

“I needed to get a taxi to the station due to not wanting to rely on the bus services. Though the driver turned up slightly late!”

“Drove from home to Wylde Green Station. Arrive at the station car park but it is full. Luckily, I manage to find a space to park on the station's road”

“Train arrived at Longbridge on time. Arranged for a local taxi company to pick me up from outside the train station and take me home”

“I walked to my local station to get the train to Birmingham new street and it was rather cumbersome with my large suitcase, two bags and three year old niece. The hill was very steep but it was OK as I left extra early to take into consideration the pitfalls”



ExperienceFellow Feedback (slide 2/7)

Buying your tickets

“Very simple website with all of the information clearly at hand. I found it a lot easier to negotiate than the train line which is the other train service I often use. I just screen shot the confirmation number and collected it at the station”

“I used a service called tickety split to enable me the greatest saving in splitting my journey up. I therefore bought separate open return tickets. I use the train line app for this and this is a very easy to use process”

“Ticket machine took my money but did not issue a ticket, really unhappy with this. It is a new machine at Garforth to replace the really slow machine that was there. Trying to select a day return to Sheffield was not simple, could not find an A-Z destinations and popular destination wasn't clear and stations were not in alphabetical order!”

“Bought online on Virgin trains website quick and easy and ticket delivered within two days”

“I use the trainline app to book tickets - although there are often booking fees, I am able to use an e-ticket which is helpful when rushing through the stations!”

“Went to the ticket booth as wanted to make sure I purchased the cheaper ticket for the right train as some are double the price, felt more comfortable/reassured that way”

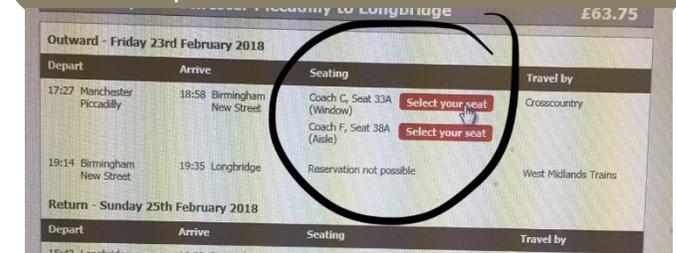
“Plenty of ticket machines taking cash and card. Good job as the people in the ticket office were busy and had queues”

“First part of journey - ticket bought in advance. Second part to be bought at station that I am changing at as I may get one of two trains. Times easily available for this”

“Didn't have time to book my ticket online beforehand so used the ticket booth and spoke with a human! I think today's ticket was cheaper than yesterday's even though I'm travelling at the same time”

“It took over 15 minutes to purchase a ticket as their card machine was not working and there was somebody taking the money from the ticket machine meaning it took much longer to get my ticket than expected. The ticket price was also almost double the price stated online”

“Website is generally easy and clear to follow when booking tickets. The only thing that confused me was as I was buying 2 tickets when I chose my seats I didn't realise you had to do one at a time and figure out which seat was the one you needed to be next to which took me a bit longer to book, see image attached. You can see how this is unclear and might not be noticed by everyone so could cause complaints later on”



ExperienceFellow Feedback (slide 3/7)

Experience of being on the train(s)

“Train was 4 minutes late departing but I got a seat which I was glad about as I didn’t have a reservation, train was clean and comfortable”

“Train has got busier at Derby. Quite a few people get on here”

“I sit in the last carriage as its the best one for exiting at Wylde Green”

“Cross country rail service ride from derby to long Eaton was great, no issues during the ride at all and the train was clean and on time”

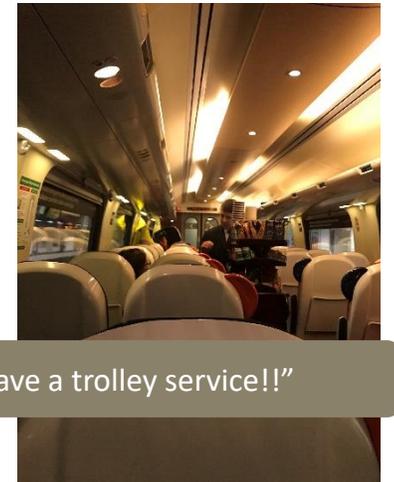
“My experience on the train is never great. This is a heavily crowded service on a Friday night and there are definitely not enough carriages”

“We were comfortable for the entire journey as we had a table seat near the loo. Our tickets were checked pretty early in to the journey so we could eat our sandwiches and nap”

“Ticket inspector came to check our tickets. He had to take my phone to click onto the ticket option and as I had both my own and my partners tickets on the app there was some confusion. I don’t know if there’s a way to put tickets in your apple wallet/send them to someone else but that would be good”

“Good experience on the train. I find seating slightly cramped but otherwise ok. Ticket conductor very pleasant and checked my senior railcard. Trolley service attendant very pleasant and efficient. His machine was not able to print receipts so he went and got a book and did it manually. The toilet facility was ok and relatively clean just rather smelly as usual on these trains. It’s a shame that this can’t be improved”

“Northern Train: Leeds to Garforth. Bad. Standing all the way”



“Hurrah - today we have a trolley service!!”

ExperienceFellow Feedback (slide 4/7)

Experience of being at train stations

“Got to the station earlier than expected so sat waiting by the big boards. Lots of staff and information available”

“This was fine - when waiting around in Birmingham it was a bit busy but expected at the time of day!”

“Leeds, big airy station. Plenty of seats but annoyingly no bins to get rid of any litter”



ExperienceFellow Feedback (slide 5/7)

Experience with staff

“Very helpful member of staff at the ticket barrier who helped my colleague when her ticket was not accepted at the barrier”

“There was a station officer near the machines who was able to look up and tell me the next train to Tamworth. Unfortunately that one was delayed as there was an obstruction on the line so I went to find the next train out. Slightly harder as I couldn't find anyone to give me the information but worked it out from noticeboards”

“The only interaction we had with staff was when our tickets were checked and he was friendly and patient while I looked through my bag. There were lots of staff visible in all stations and I felt comfortable approaching them”

“Northern Rail: on train staff were good and I showed him the online statement and didn't press the issue that I did not have a ticket due to the failure of the machine. He was polite and apologised”

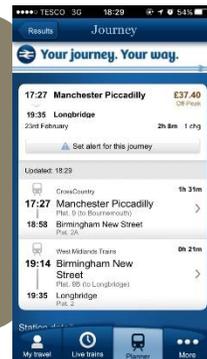
ExperienceFellow Feedback (slide 6/7)

Interchanging: navigating through the station and finding the next train/mode of transport

“Clear signs and announcements re: the train platform for the train”

“Oh no. I've just missed a connecting train home. Never mind a 10 minute wait on a cold platform won't hurt!”

“I checked the train times to see what time I'd get in and when my next train is on national rail app. Looks like my train should get in on time and there's enough time to get my connection depending on where the platforms are and if I get lost at new street”



“This was very easy. Stockport was a joy as always, and I was kept in the warmth by one of many waiting rooms. The rest rooms are of a good quality also. I was able to see the electronic board from my waiting room so not to wait in the cold for my train”

“Multiple displays at Leeds which is good, however conflicting information on the quickest route to Sheffield”

“was a little concerned I'd make the connection but all fine”



ExperienceFellow Feedback (slide 7/7)

Interchanging: experience of delays/other journey interruptions

“The departures board indicates the train running 1 minute late (will it come any later?)”

“Train is running about 7 minutes late to get into new street according to national rail. Platform for next train is the opposite end of new street and I think I’ll have to leave the barriers and enter at another side so might be a bit tight”

“Cross country train was delayed but that is very normal and has come to be expected from this operator- they are more often than not late than on time”

“I am familiar with the way to my ongoing platform from the one I normally get off at, but due to a delay I had to rush”

“My train to Birmingham was running slightly behind - usually the conductor/driver will announce the connecting train times and what platforms people need to go to etc. but on this service he didn’t. I had to use my app to find the train times which was slightly annoying!”

“There was a 3 minute delay from Stockport which was made up across the course of the journey. Overall no disruptions or delays, and interchanging was no problem”

“My return train (16:10) is cancelled. I was advised by station staff to travel with a different train company as I would have to wait 30 minutes or more for the next direct train. I now have to travel with to Leicester with East Midlands Trains then change for a train to Birmingham. Not good Cross Country Trains. Not good at all. Very inconvenient”



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