

# Routine rail maintenance: Passengers' experiences and priorities

Market research findings

September 2017

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# Background and objectives



# The context for this study

Network Rail is currently working towards significant upgrades and other developments across the railways in the UK; this inevitably causes disruption for passengers.

In its role as the champion for rail users, Transport Focus has previously conducted several pieces of research to understand passenger needs and priorities relating to this disruption, in order to inform how and when this type of engineering work takes place with passenger interests at heart, and how passengers are communicated with and assisted through it.



In addition to more major developments, Network Rail must carry out more regular checks, maintenance, repairs and renewal work to help ensure the railways run as smoothly as possible on a day to day basis. Again, though necessary, this impacts on passengers' journeys.

**Alongside Transport Focus, Network Rail wished to expand its understanding of the passenger perspective on these more 'everyday' works.**

**This research has explored this in detail, focussing on South East England, and is intended to inform Network Rail's approach to routine maintenance works during the next Control Period.**

# Outline of the research

## Objective

Understand passengers' experiences, knowledge and expectations of routine railway maintenance and renewal



### General knowledge and attitudes

- How railways work: passengers' views and experiences
- Knowledge about the need for routine maintenance
- How much passengers care, and how far into the future their interest in railway condition stretches, i.e. beyond short term journeys

### Timings

- Passenger perspective on when work happens and duration

### Communication

- Passengers' views and preferences about how they are informed about such work

## Method

### Focus groups

- 7 x sessions
- London, Sevenoaks, Brighton
- Mix of journey purpose, frequency, demographics, etc.



For detailed exploration of passenger views and experiences, including critiquing examples of existing communications

### Intercepts at stations

- 3 x sessions; 85 intercepts in total
- Bromley South (evening), Tonbridge (weekend), Lewes (weekend)



To capture more immediate attitudes in a more natural context, which could be mis-represented if relying only on the more rational discussion environment of focus groups

*More details on methodology available on request*

Headlines



# The headlines

**Routine maintenance isn't naturally seen as a necessary part of the provision of a railway service – it's more likely to be seen as an unreasonable inconvenience**

*I pay for a season ticket, but I pay all this money and what does it go towards?  
Tonbridge commuter*

**The current experience and perception of routine maintenance work is largely negative**

*The train journey should be part of the fun, especially if it's for leisure, but I just find it so stressful  
Brighton, business*

**Passengers do support the need for routine maintenance of the railway, if they are prompted to acknowledge it**

*These things do need to be done, its for our safety isn't it  
Sevenoaks, leisure*



**This means that Network Rail should continue to invest in this**

**But the industry must also work to improve the experience of engineering disruption and buy-in from passengers – there is some unfulfilled potential here**

*I don't think people think about maintaining things, they think its about fixing things, if they knew this they might be more tolerant  
Sevenoaks, leisure*

Routine maintenance work:

The current passenger  
perspective





# The size of the problem for passengers

## Compared to other causes of disruption, routine maintenance work itself has relatively infrequent and little visible impact



In focus group discussions, it could sometimes be challenging to keep participants on-topic, with other issues being a much bigger deal for them (big-bang development work e.g. Waterloo, London Bridge; unplanned delays; industrial action)

Routine maintenance work, largely happening during periods of quieter footfall, is relatively less significant



Particularly true for frequent, peak-time travellers. Weekend, late night / early morning, and infrequent travellers tend to bear more of the brunt.

**To some degree the way routine work is managed – in terms of when it happens – is already working as well as might be expected**

# But it doesn't mean that careful management of this type of work is less important!

## In passengers' minds, maintenance work is conflated with other causes of disruption:

- Major development works
- Unplanned delays and cancellations  
*Due to signal or points failures, bad weather, staff shortage / illness, trespassers on tracks, etc.*
- Unrelated issues like industrial action  
*(though it's likely that recent, well-publicised strikes by Southern staff have inflated this issue more than usual)*

## It can make a big impact when it does happen to be your journey that's affected

*[I made] a special trip... with my son to Twickenham... something happened to spoil that day and we had to make special arrangements to fit it in*  
Brighton, leisure

*The train journey should be part of the fun, especially if it's for leisure, but I just find it so stressful*  
Brighton, business

*When it's good, it's really good, and when it's bad, it's awful*  
London, leisure



## And it can all add up to broader distrust in the railways:

*The good thing is you know every bank holiday, you do not take the kids anywhere on the train!*  
Brighton, business

*I've got to the point where if I'm flying out of Gatwick I'll drive now – I just don't trust the trains any more*  
Brighton, leisure



**Although a relatively smaller issue among all types of disruption events, routine maintenance work is another brick in the wall of "issues" that many people perceive with rail**

**So if any negative perceptions of routine engineering works can be improved or turned around, it's a small step towards better overall attitudes towards rail**

# Routine maintenance works: the facts as they are experienced by passengers



## A black box of mysterious, unspecified “engineering work”

*Often the nature of the work is unknown; usually the benefits or end objectives are unknown*

*We don't know what they're doing*  
*London, leisure*

*You [just] assume signal failure*  
*London, late night leisure*



## Quality and presence of information is inconsistent

*There's nobody there to explain anything'*  
*Brighton, business*

*It feels like some of this stuff at the weekend is very short notice, so can be frustrating*  
*Sevenoaks, commuter*

*The first website said it was fine and another said that no trains were running*  
*London, commuter*

*These must be scheduled more than a year in advance...could they make it more public knowledge so people are prepared*  
*Sevenoaks, commuter*



## “Plan B” help often inadequate or undesirable

*There's been occasions when ...I've had to get the bus, and it's never very clear where the bus is going from*  
*Brighton, leisure*

*There's one announcement that really winds me up, saying there are no trains and ...to make a plan B, but not telling you what the plan B is – end of!*  
*Sevenoaks, commuter*

# Routine maintenance works: public attitude



(Without prompting or atypical explanation), passengers invariably talk about engineering works in negative tones:

At best, a joke

At worst, inducing anger



*You never hear of TFL saying that the central line's closed because they're polishing the track*  
Brighton, business

*At weekends they always seem to be doing repairs*  
Brighton, leisure

*I sometimes don't know if they just have to spend up their budget [i.e. works are a ruse to demonstrate demand for future budget allocation]*  
London, commuter

*It's immediately irritating so I just think oh I'll turn my music up*  
London, commuter

*It doesn't stop me travelling it just makes me really angry, 'cause that's the only way to get there*  
London, commuter

*In advance of the groups, participants were asked to bring along images or objects which represented how they felt when they discovered their line was to be affected by planned engineering work. These images are a few examples of the material they brought. Some other examples are also given in the Appendix.*

# Public understanding of the role of infrastructure as part of the overall rail service

## Knowledge and awareness of how the rail network is managed is very varied:

- Most know that private companies operate the trains
- Awareness of an organisation with the responsibility for infrastructure is there, but less top of mind

*It's a separate company from the train company, erm, Network Rail isn't it? Sevenoaks, leisure*

Overall, passengers' relationship with and knowledge of the railways is usually focussed primarily on the actual trains and train journeys.

## Infrastructure maintenance is a less salient element which they have little engagement with

Perhaps rightly so – in other industries, customers don't usually need to engage with the nuts and bolts of how a service is run



But a lack of acknowledgement of the infrastructure side of the railways can result in the perception that the role of maintaining it is at odds with the running of the service

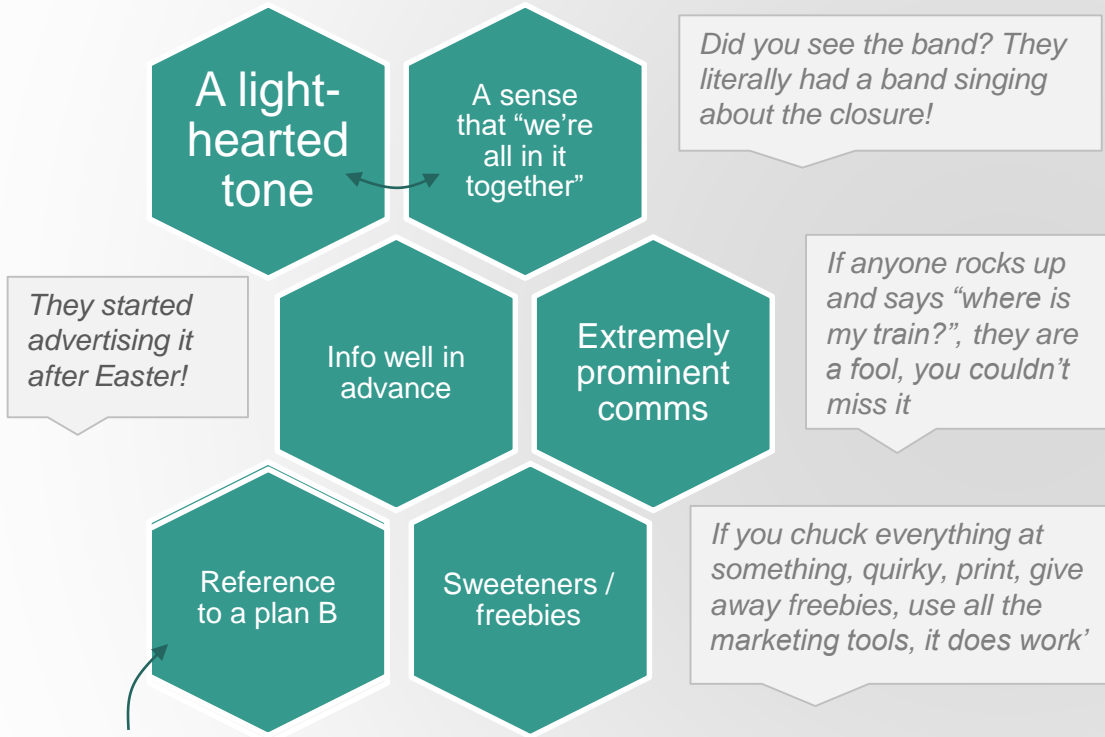
...leading to a blame game, or even that Network Rail is somewhat devious, hiding behind the TOCs and not publically admitting responsibility for disruption

**Is there a better balance to be struck, in which passengers appreciate – or at least more overtly acknowledge – Network Rail's role as an admissible and necessary part of the railway network?**

# Case studies: when disruption is handled (relatively) well – what can we learn?

1

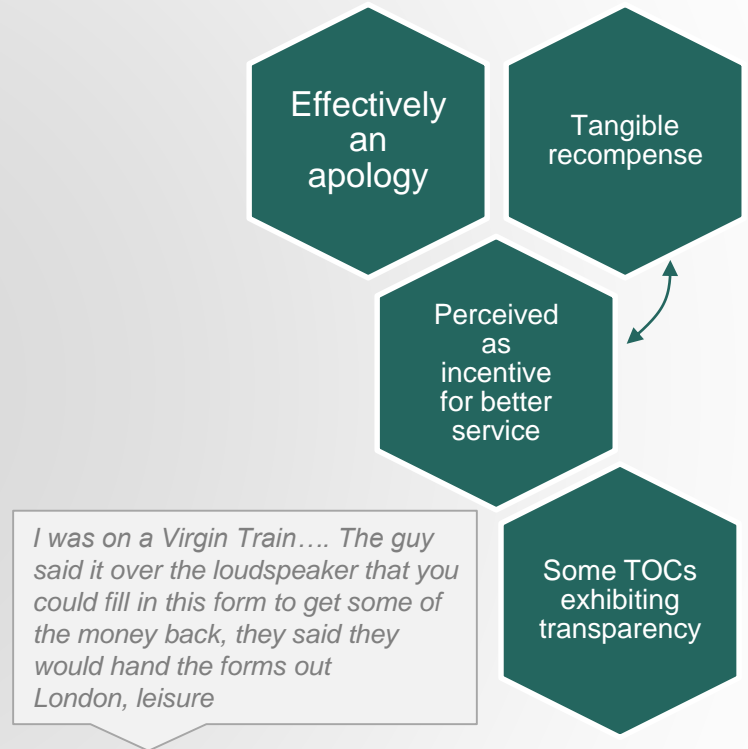
Sevenoaks commuters praised the way the recent closure of London Bridge had been handled



NB. Some criticism that this wasn't clear or specific, but acknowledgement that at least trains were (known to be) redirected to Victoria

2

Delay-repay is becoming well known and appreciated



**Though not specifically relating to routine maintenance work, these examples of passengers' positive experiences of disruption handling demonstrate principles that can be applied in other scenarios (And perhaps they also raise expectations?)**

# Case studies: routine maintenance – identifying some particular pain points

1

## Late evening train journey after landing at Gatwick Airport

Late evening service suspension which in this case did not suit the passenger

Respondent described a difficult journey from Gatwick Airport back to home (London), after a holiday:

- Tried to book train journey in advance but found inconsistent information on websites – one website implied journeys could be disrupted, another mentioned nothing (obvious)
- She took a risk and booked the tickets, but found on the day that there was no trains when she needed them, and no alternative

We wanted to get the very last train which would have been at half 11, which would have matched up with our flight. [But] there was no alternative, no replacement buses, so we had to get a cab which was very expensive

London, leisure

No plan B suggested or offered by TOC (leaving this infrequent rail user quite vulnerable at this time of day)

Apparently contradictory information, leading to passenger not being informed in advance

2

## An off-peak day trip

Info on the day, not in advance (for this passenger)

No obvious practical help

I went to Sissinghurst last Wednesday, and there were huge announcements on platforms saying “there will be no trains running for five days”, and this was repeating itself, and it was quite confusing.... “Expect delays, expect confusion”, [but] they don’t tell you what the alternative ways to travel are.

Even when there’s a tube strike there’s quite a lot of information beforehand.

Should I stop going to Sissinghurst because it’s too complicated...?

I wish there was one centralised site that shows you the best way... It might not [actually] be as complicated [as the signage implied] – they almost warn you off

London, leisure

Desire for minimal effort; implication for tailored journey info

Negative (perhaps excessively) angle to the communications – focussing on disruption only

The value placed on  
maintenance work by rail users





# Despite the negatives, people do support the need for routine maintenance work!



**Parallels drawn with other scenarios, and own industries**



**Recognition of growing journey volumes on rail, and the need to keep infrastructure in order**



**Recognition of rail's importance to wider economy**



**Common sense!**

*If this is needed, it's needed*  
London, commuter

*I don't object to the works, I realise these things need to be done, and it's for passenger safety...  
There is going to be no good time to do these things*  
Brighton, business

*When I was a boy and went camping with my Mum and Dad, they taught me that if I looked after our equipment it will last, it just makes sense doesn't it?*  
Sevenoaks, leisure

*If something did happen [as a result of not doing regular engineering work] we'd all be up in arms*  
Brighton, business

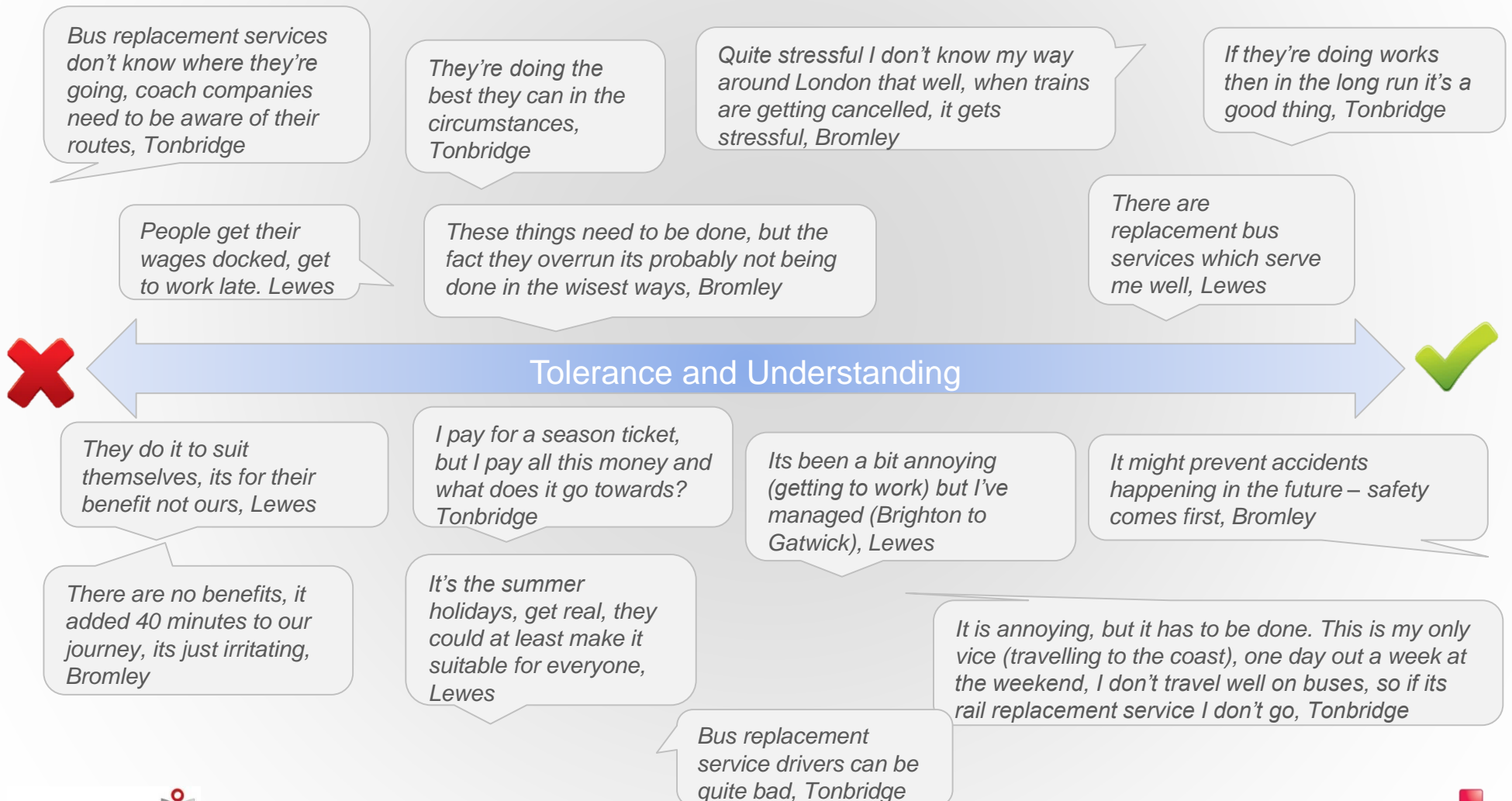
*If I was told in five years time that the railway had to be shut for six months because ten years ago the decision was made not to maintain [it], I'd be really pissed off*  
London, commuter

**Crucially, these sentiments were expressed by focus group participants after a short spell of discussion on the topic, and / or explanation about the type of work and its purpose, from the moderator. This helpful context of rational thought rarely exists in normal life and during challenging rail journeys**

*NB. While most passengers appreciate that the benefits of routine maintenance work might not be visible, their support for it does reduce when passengers see what appears to be the opposite – that signal failures still happen, etc.*

# Real time opinions – attitudes towards the engineering works

Passengers have mixed opinions - some more tolerant than others that works are happening and mixed emotions ranging from feeling irritated and stressed and disbelief its happening to understanding it needs to be done



# Real time opinions about communications, knowledge about why its happening and views on timings

## Communications

Saturday passengers (therefore possibly more infrequent passengers) tended to be less aware (e.g. Saturday interviews in Lewes, Tonbridge)

Some were happy with information they could access and others felt there could be more information

*I don't know what they're doing but I know about the delays though, no one lets you know about what's going on. I'm a lay person, I don't know about engineering works, but they could perhaps be done at other times when they wouldn't have such a big impact, Lewes*

*More notice would be nice, maybe some alternatives to help people get from A to B, Bromley*

*I found out three days ago from a friend, Lewes*

*There's always information at the stations and on the trains, I check before my journey too, Tonbridge*

*Mildly aware, seen on posters. I've got caught out in the past with bus replacement services where I've not been aware its been happening (where advertised in small print around the station), Tonbridge*

*They usually give advance warnings, Lewes*

## Knowledge about why its happening

Limited thoughts as to why it's happening, more concerned with how to get from A to B and how long it will take

*Hopefully there will be less odd things happening if the signals and the track are up to date, Tonbridge*

*They have to keep the trains running don't they, it means the train doesn't fall off the tracks Lewes*

*It might prevent accidents happening in the future – safety comes first, Bromley*

## Timing

It's evident that no one time is going to suit everyone, there is always a reason why it shouldn't be happening now

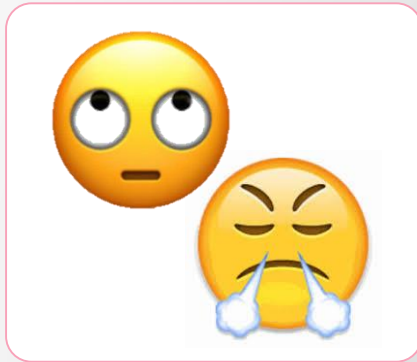
*It's the summer holidays, get real, they could at least make it suitable for everyone, Lewes*

*You could argue that more people are going into London as it's the summer holidays, so perhaps not the best time, Tonbridge*

*They do it at the weekend to avoid the commuters being disrupted, but it's annoying when travelling at the weekend, Tonbridge*

# So there is a mis-match of perspectives

## Customer perception



## Industry perception



Not getting what they've paid for



Feeling let down that the service is ineffective



Spending money wisely for an effective railway



Working hard for rail users' best interests

...but in the space between public and industry perceptions is a barrier, not a wall

Both the public and industry want the same thing: an effective railway



Potential to break down this perspective mis-match and come to a compromise



Two parts to this barrier that need to be broken down



### Public perception

Although passengers have the potential to accept routine maintenance works, currently their main touchpoints reinforce negative assumptions:

#### Touchpoints

- Information stating that services will be disrupted
- Poor experience of disruption impact
- See that services return to normal with no visible evidence or benefit



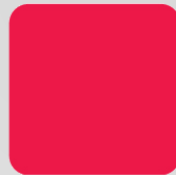
### Passenger experience

Planning and making journeys during times of planned engineering work largely (remembered as) a poor experience

- Inconsistent information
- Little assistance with plan B
- Effort-laden, lower quality journey using plan B
- ...for the same price

So how can perception and experience be improved?

Improving the perception of  
routine maintenance works



# Telling passengers why to gain their buy-in



**Passengers have mixed opinions on how much detail they want**

*I like to know, if I know exactly what they're doing I have a bit more patience  
London, leisure*

*Just keep it simple!  
London, leisure*



**But even if they say detail is unnecessary, the evidence suggests support is stronger with even a basic understanding**



**We recommend briefly highlighting benefits**

*We didn't realise they did all these things, and it makes a difference  
Sevenoaks, commuter*



**Consider safety as an angle in comms**

- Although not a widespread view, the safety 'benefit' was acknowledged by a few – especially those using rail less frequently
- Safety as a message therefore resonates well with some, and communicating maintenance within the context of safety (as well as reliability) could change mindsets to an acknowledgement that maintenance needs to happen and therefore greater tolerance of it

*Regular maintenance is important... What they're doing is ok because otherwise there'd be more train crashes  
Brighton, leisure*

*It might ease people if they knew engineering works were for your safety, rather than just thinking it's strikes again  
Brighton, leisure*

*These things do need to be done, its for our safety isn't it  
Seveoaks, commuter*

# Some other thoughts



## 360° feedback

- Tell passengers the work is happening
- Tell them that it has happened (and why)
- Say thank you

*The Council has an app for pot holes where people send photos in of a pot hole, they get a photo back with the team to show its been fixed*  
Sevenoaks, commuter

## A brand / slogan?



## Foster a sense of “in this together”

*Some companies have really started personalising things e.g. “this is Bob and Jane” – it makes you more receptive*  
Sevenoaks, commuter



**E.g. freebies at Waterloo; live band at London Bridge**  
*(Caveat: Waterloo freebies also provoked sarcastic criticism; clearly needs to be used appropriately and may not resonate with all)*



Improving the experience of  
routine maintenance works:

Information



# Advance information: when



## For frequent travellers, making a regular journey (e.g. commuters)

- ✓ As far in advance as possible
- ✓ But continuously / with reminders, so not to forget
- ✓ Group participants often nominally suggested at least a month's notice

In order to plan lives around the disruption

Possibly involving time off work, different working arrangements, finding other routes or places to stay overnight, etc.

*(NB. This amount of notice is required by these people, and not limited to these types of journey. They may travel to/from work during the week but will make an ad hoc journey on the same route or from the same station at the weekend for a different reason, and so they expect to receive information affecting that weekend journey far in advance )*



## For those making less frequent, ad hoc journeys (usually for leisure or business)

- ✓ At the point of planning / booking – **must be very prominent**

*If you book in advance they should say there's something going on –sometimes it's very small and not always relevant  
Brighton, business*

In order to make a decision about whether, when and how to travel

Or at least to be prepared for a longer or different journey (e.g. involving a bus)

*Strong opinions that tickets should not be available for sale if a journey cannot be made in the normal way*

*In practice, retailers sell flexible tickets meaning the specific effect of disruption cannot always be predicted. Equally some passengers may decide a bus replacement is acceptable – or necessary, if they must travel. But passengers must be given the information so that they have the option to agree to the purchase, or not*

# Advance information: where (1)

Research participants gave lots of suggestions for the best channel they would like to see used



Ultimately, a wide mix of channels is required to ensure the needs of different audiences are met:



**Frequent travellers  
with regular journey**

- Typically exposed to messages at stations / on board, which appears to work reasonably well
- Tend not to check status in advance for current or future (familiar) journeys
- In addition to in-journey messages, would prefer pro-actively “pushed” notification, especially through electronic means
- Email looks to be an un-tapped opportunity



**Less frequent travellers,  
booking in advance**

- Require very clear notice through all booking channels (both online and offline)
- “Post-booking-pre-journey” comms also feels intuitive for many, either via email, text or app

*Like with easyjet, ..it texts you to say don't forget to check in, you need to allow longer for check in because something is happening  
Brighton, leisure*



**Less frequent travellers,  
not booking in advance**

A tricky audience to reach, but:

- Make use of local news media
- And consider train's part within wider trip – link with other organisations to increase potential touchpoints. E.g.
  - Announcements relevant to rail users on board a flight soon to land at Gatwick Airport
  - Comms through football clubs for matches likely to be accessed by rail
  - Similarly, comms through theatre ticket retailers, etc.

**Plus, all groups would like to access information via  
staff on site at stations / on board**

# Information: where (2)

## The overriding principle: routine maintenance alerts / information must be prominent and un-missable



Both in advance, and at the time


*If there's planned works, let there be some hosts there to help people through the journey  
Brighton, business*



The work already causes disruption; passengers lose patience when effort is increased needlessly by information that is not fit for purpose

*We shouldn't have to search for when engineering works [are happening]  
Brighton, leisure*



 *Notable example: in some contexts, small alerts alongside online journey planners / status pages aren't enough – e.g. in Brighton people felt this was always in place “just in case” during long periods of strike action, so they began to ignore it*



If it genuinely is prominent, passengers feel it's fair that they share some responsibility for arranging their travel

*Honestly, if you missed all that stuff [about London Bridge's closure.... it's your fault  
London, leisure*



Salient info can foster constructive word of mouth, for even wider reach

*I passed the information onto a client of mine who didn't know about it  
Sevenoaks, commuter*



*There may be concerns that highly salient engineering messaging could create more negative attitudes, fostering an image that the railway is “broken”. It's true that this hasn't been tested robustly for routine maintenance work, but:*

- Evidence from large scale projects at London Bridge and Waterloo indicates this doesn't have to be the case*
- We strongly recommend emphasising the benefits of such work, taking a positive angle rather than focusing only on the short term disruptive impact (as currently); this should help to protect attitudes*

# Information: the content

Passengers need to know:



When?



What's happening?



How does it affect my journey?



What's my alternative?

**We do recommend giving brief overview of why the work is happening:**

- ✓ Helps gain passengers' buy-in
- ✓ Naturally creates more positive tone to engineering discourse

*If I know exactly what they're doing I have a bit more patience*  
London, leisure

*I didn't know they did these things*  
Sevenoaks, commuter

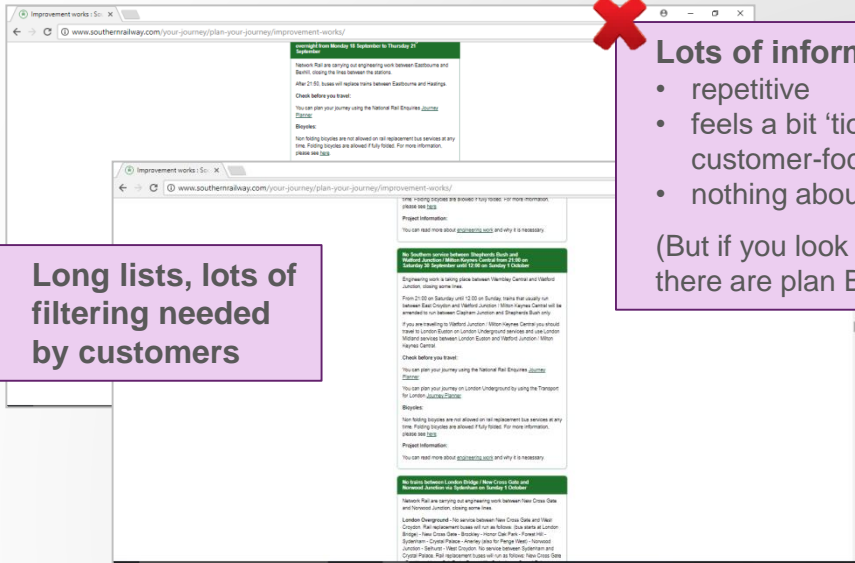
*They bring it to life a bit, saying what they're doing. It says thank you*  
Brighton, business

*The warning about disruption is on there every day now, and it's just a list of dates*  
Brighton, business

*You need specifics – closing some lines, what lines?*  
Brighton, business

*There's one announcement that really winds me up, saying there are no trains and ...to make a plan B, but not telling you what the plan B is – end of!*  
Sevenoaks, commuter

# Some examples:

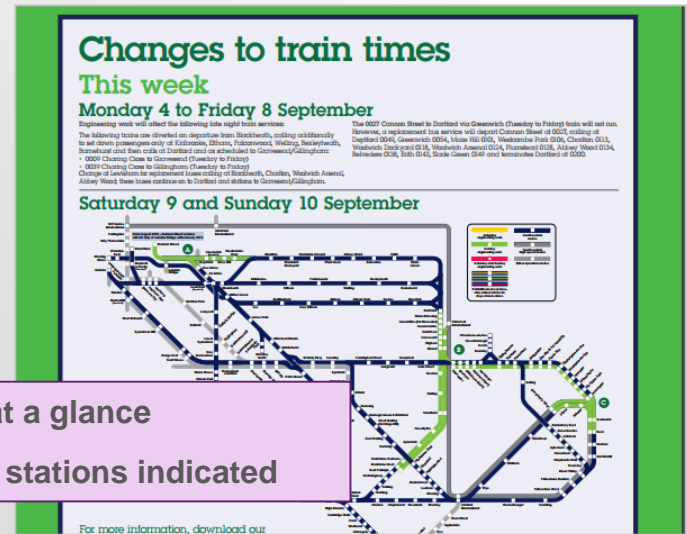


**Lots of information... but:**

- repetitive
- feels a bit 'tick-box' rather than customer-focused
- nothing about why / benefits

(But if you look for it, in some cases there are plan B suggestions)

Long lists, lots of filtering needed by customers



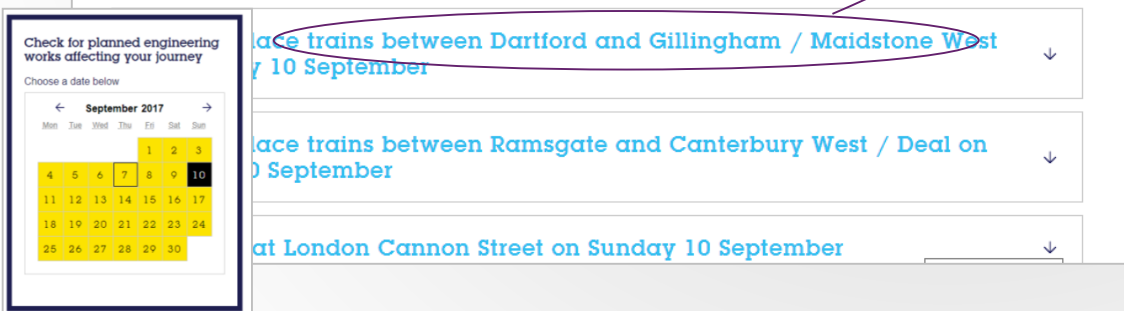
Visual, at a glance  
Specific stations indicated

Specific dates  
(providing a single travel date / weekend can be specified by customer)

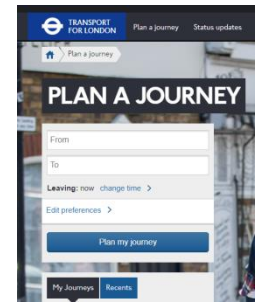
Is my station along this route??

People want tailored, often interactive information (and they've become use to this!)

## Engineering work for 10th September 2017



Citymapper



Improving the experience of  
routine maintenance works:

Practical tactics



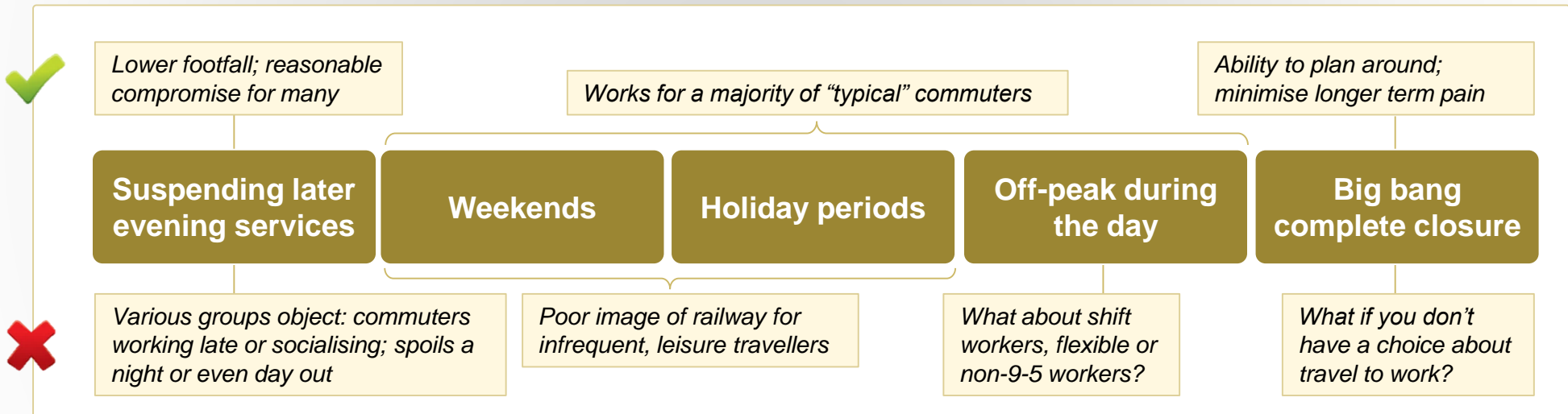
# When the work should take place: passengers' views



**Though not universal, group participants generally assumed or favoured that work takes place overnight**  
*(usually referring to beyond midnight / before early morning (5-6am) journeys)*

*I wonder why they don't just do it at night, they do road works at night  
 London, commuter*

## Where this isn't practical, it's impossible to please everyone:



*Why do you do it on a bank holiday when you know it's going to be busy?  
 London, leisure*

*They're making the best of a bad situation by doing works on a Sunday – if they did it on a week day there'd be riots!  
 Brighton, leisure*

*The problem for us is the hangover into Monday  
 Sevenoaks, commuter*

*For us, a few days a month is fine, but the day I'm travelling, please don't do it!  
 Brighton, business*



# When the work should take place: some recommendations

**Clearly, each access need must be planned on a case by case basis**

...but two important themes did arise from passengers' debates:



**Passengers need to have a sense of control: timings must be clear and feel straightforward, "contained"**

NB. This isn't limited to short, sharp, total closures; every evening for a week, for example, can be acceptable if presented concisely

*If it was disruption for a month and then nothing else for six months, people would be ok with that, but it just goes on and on throughout the year'*  
Brighton, business

*We can all get our heads around this and get our plan B*  
Sevenoaks, commuter



**It's likely to help if they understand why engineering timings planned to take place when they do**

*Can the public be signposted to read more on the decisions for timings?*

*I've seen some documentaries on this - they are given a limited amount of time to do a lot of stuff, they are so up against it, if they have bad weather, they have to get the rails back for early Monday morning, so I do have some sympathy*  
Sevenoaks, commuter

# Effective help for plan B

## Some guidance points arising from passengers' discussions about experiences of poor and best practice:



As we've seen, wherever possible, passengers want tailored assistance, and specific information

*Somebody with a national rail coat on to say what you do now is take this bus, and then you'll get to Gatwick  
London, leisure*



Personal, face to face help



Effective collaboration with other modes, e.g. TfL – to minimise passenger effort in using a rail ticket which is deemed valid on tube, for example



Special consideration around bus replacements:

- Lots of clear, calm assistance and signage to help navigate to buses – think, minimise the effort and anxiety in what is already a potentially stressful situation
- Fast A-B bus options in addition to multi-stop equivalents of the train journey?
- Consider how the physical bus vehicle looks and feels – does it come across as the no-frills or after-thought option?

*You just know you're going to get some old double decker bus, diesel fumes for the whole journey  
Sevenoaks, commuter*

*If it's a coach you can get comfortable, but it's a bus... you've paid for a ticket  
Brighton, business*

*It's not that a bus is the wrong thing to do, it's just how they do it  
London, commuter*

*Maybe a coffee wouldn't go amiss, or a bottle of water ... it would ease the burden  
Brighton, business*



Little extras can help soften the blow

# Compensation

## It's a very common appeal:

*If we don't turn up for an appointment with our work, then we have to give customers a goodwill payment*  
Brighton, business

*I think they should give you the option... saying you can do this, this and this, or if not here's a refund*  
Brighton, business

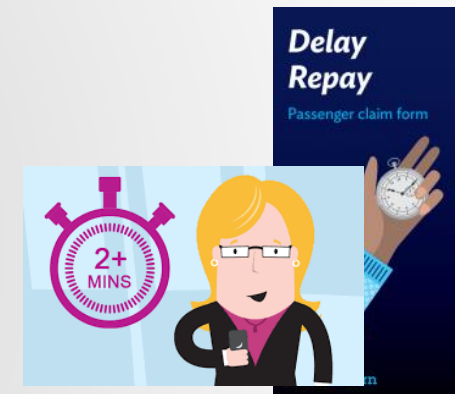
*I think the only real way [to ensure engineering is managed with passengers in mind] is to penalise themselves – if you're getting half a service, we should get some money off*  
Brighton, leisure

*If I've bought a steak meal and you give me a burger, I don't want to pay for a steak*  
London, commuter

*If you're going to have engineering works, don't sell a train ticket for that time, or if they do, give a refund. You can't sell something and then say we're not running that day, here's the bus*  
London, leisure

*Part of me has a rationale side ... but on the other hand, I've bought a season ticket which at no point specifies that ...there are a lot of days when there is maintenance work – here's a service we're selling but you can't use it all year round*  
Sevenoaks, commuter

...And are expectations heightened in light of passengers' awareness that compensation is given in other circumstances?



**If compensation is not (always?) practical, it's another comms task to manage expectations**

*Could there be greater tolerance if passengers better acknowledged that fares pay for infrastructure provision as well as the journey from A to B? We suspect this could be the case for some passenger groups, but communicating this in itself would require careful management, since some passenger groups tend to bear the brunt of routine maintenance works more than others...*

Summary



# Summary (1)

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## **Routine maintenance isn't naturally seen as a necessary part of the provision of a railway service – it's more likely to be seen as an unreasonable inconvenience**

- Routine maintenance work is just one more contributor to a widespread public perception that the railways are not always, wholly reliable
- Passengers don't readily distinguish between the different possible reasons for changes to train services – including unplanned disruption, major development work, staffing issues, and unfavourable weather as well as routine maintenance work
- In fact they rarely engage with the fact that the railways need to be maintained: the infrastructure side of the railways is very much behind the scenes
- This feels appropriate, but means that the work Network Rail does can sometimes be perceived purely as an unreasonable inconvenience, rather than a necessary part of the overall service

# Summary (2)

## The current experience and perception of routine maintenance work is largely negative

- Although for most passengers it's actually not a regular occurrence, when they are affected by routine maintenance works, the experience is rarely positive:
  - Information is of inconsistent volume and quality (sometimes it's good, but too often it's not)
  - Passengers really want to be given more help when it comes to arranging a “plan B”, and this is often lacking
- Passengers also rarely know the reasons for the changes to train services, meaning their only touchpoints with this type of engineering work are framed in a negative context:
  - being told about disruption to their journeys (or not!)
  - experiencing that disruption
  - ... and then not seeing any obvious improvement, due to the nature of this work
- As a result, regular engineering works are seen as at best a joke (affecting “every” weekend or bank holiday) and at worst a real cause for anger
- Importantly, this can easily extend into an overall perception of the railways being inadequate

# Summary (3)

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**Passengers do support the need for routine maintenance of the railway, if they are prompted to acknowledge it**

**This means that Network Rail should continue to invest in this**

**But the industry must also work to improve the experience of, and buy-in from passengers – there is some unfulfilled potential here....**

# Summary (4)

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To increase the buy-in from passengers, it's partly a marketing and communications job:

- **Tell people why the work is happening**

While some people report that they are not interested in the reasons for disruption, it's clear from this research that when they become aware of what's going on behind the scenes, the vast majority passengers are much more supportive.

We do recommend very briefly outlining the purpose of engineering works in order to realise any latent support and increase tolerance – and we would argue that passengers will have a better experience if they know the disruption has some justification

In particular, the notion that routine maintenance works protect the safety of the railway, resonates with passengers. This could be leveraged more in communications to help gain their buy in

- **Complete the loop** – tell them when it's finished and what's been achieved, and say thanks for bearing with us
- **Consider “branding”** the concept of routine maintenance works – to position it as something important, deliberate and well-managed
- **Utilise softer ways to show passengers they matter** (e.g. visibility of managers, freebies to make a bus journey more palatable)



# Summary (5)

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To improve experiences, TOCs and Network Rail must work hard on:

- **Information:**

- Passengers need information as far in advance as possible, and through a wide set of channels in order that all audiences are reached
- Crucially, the alerts to upcoming planned works must be really salient
- The ability to find out more must then be made very clear, and as effortless as possible
- ↓
- Passengers need to know when the work will happen, how it will affect their specific journeys, and what their specific alternatives are
- And again, an overview of the purpose of the work is recommended

- **Ensuring the work happens at the most suitable time**

- (There is no reason to believe this is not already the case, but there could be potential to improve the way passengers understand it)
- There is a wide consensus among passengers that working overnight seems sensible. However when this is pragmatically inappropriate, there is no good time to disrupt peoples' journeys
- Each project needs to be scheduled on a case by case basis; we suggest that it could then be worthwhile to explain the scheduling decisions to those affected

# Summary (6)

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...and on

- **Making the journey as easy as possible when passengers do have to make their journey during disruption**
  - Tailored information
  - Visibility and face to face support from the TOC and/or Network Rail as passengers negotiate the situation on the day
  - Effective collaboration with other transport modes, with special attention on what it looks and feels like to travel by replacement bus service
  
- **Consider ways to acknowledge the disruption, so that passengers feel that they matter**
  - Compensation? Some feel very strongly that they have paid for a service which hasn't been delivered; some form of acknowledgement of this may help passengers to feel that the rail industry cares that passengers are inconvenienced by engineering work , rather than feeling as though their custom is taken for granted
  - Freebies / entertainment?

# Images and objects respondents used to express their thoughts on rail disruption



## The board game 'Frustration'

I'm not cross, I'm not angry – as I understand works have to happen and people have to get on with their jobs (maintaining the rails). But it puts me out and it is frustrating



## I'm Brownd Off

I'm thinking of a journey when I came back from Norfolk after visiting my Mum, I set off at about 2 o'clock on a Sunday. When I got to London there were no trains from London Bridge and I had to go from here to there to get home, it took ages. It was going dark and I didn't like it, I felt vulnerable. (Female)



## There are different emotions for different elements of the service

Peter is a part time fencer so decided to make the Emoji Dice out of some odds and ends. Emojis are all the rage so he thought he would do something different. You can roll the dice to see how else you feel.

With a happier face the train is fine, I don't have to drive, I can read a book and I can travel there and back for £8:50 (Sevenoaks to North East London)

With a 'shock-gasp-horror' the stations are much better than they used to be, you used to turn up and you had no idea if your train was coming

# Images and objects respondents used to express their thoughts on rail disruption



'These are earplugs – for being on a replacement bus service with children'



## **Stress balls**

It happened on a Saturday. I went to Southampton – as South West was affected by Waterloo. I had problems getting back, but once you got past Havant it was fine. I wasn't so concerned about getting home, it was getting there on time that worried me, I had to get there on time.



## **Deflated balloons**

To represent feeling deflated when things go wrong



## **Napoleon suffered defeat**

Thinking about the plan and how I'm going to alter my journey, lots of other people are doing the same thing, so there's over crowding and you can't get a seat. Then its getting to where you need to go late, other people are waiting for you to arrive, all the time you're thinking you're going to be late, you get stressed.

Thank you...



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