

Communicating suicides on the railway

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22 May 2015

Dear Phil

Communicating suicides on the railway

Transport Focus is pleased to have worked with Network Rail to research passengers' views about suicides on the railway. I enclose a copy of the research findings.

A key purpose of the research was to establish if, from a passenger perspective, there is a better phrase than "person hit by a train" as the explanation for delays and cancellations following a suicide. The need to understand passenger opinion was driven by belief that the phrase may be advertising the railway as a good place to commit suicide.

The research is clear. Irrespective of whether passengers accepted the premise that use of "person hit by a train" may be leading to copycat behaviour, they did not like the phrase. It was regarded as too graphic. It was regarded as insensitive when spliced into a computer-generated public address message. The phrase which passengers in the research strongly preferred was "emergency services dealing with an incident". It was felt to be honest and convey a sense of gravity, while not being unnecessarily graphic. However, passengers felt that if an individual specifically asked about the nature of the incident, for example in conversation with a member of station staff, they should receive an honest response.

In the light of this research, I am writing to recommend that for top level communications the industry moves to using "emergency services dealing with an incident" in place of "person hit by a train".

Yours sincerely


Anthony Smith
Chief Executive

Encl.



Communicating delays caused by suicides on the railway

Summary report, May 2015

Ella Majava & Carol McNaughton Nicholls



Truth.

Communicating delays caused by suicides on the railway

Summary report

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Ella Majava & Carol McNaughton Nicholls, Truth

Introduction

How to communicate delays caused by suicides on the railway is an emotive, impactful and complex issue. However, despite an increasing body of international research on suicide behaviour and suicide prevention on the railways, there has been little research exploring passengers' perceptions. This issue was the focus of this research.

Background to the research

There were 281 recorded suicides on the railway in 2013/14 – approximately 5% of total suicides in the UK. The issue is a serious concern to the rail industry due to the various effects it has: trauma for train staff, delays and disruption to passengers, and the loss of life and impact on those directly affected by the event. The rail industry is already working with Samaritans (the national charity that aims to reduce suicide) to implement preventative measures.

This focus on suicide prevention has highlighted the risk of imitative ('copycat') behaviour. The way suicides are referred to when communicating them on the railway is believed to influence or encourage imitative behaviour, with some areas becoming known as 'hot spots' and announcements inadvertently 'advertising' the railway as a method of suicide. There is a desire from the rail industry therefore for announcements relating to delays and disruption caused by suicides to be communicated in such a way that mitigates the risk of potentially encouraging imitative behaviour.

At the same time, train operating companies (TOCs) are committed to providing honest, transparent and clear information to passengers, so they can plan their onward journey and trust in the industry is maintained. In addition, passengers are more sympathetic to delays when they know the cause is a serious incident and outside of the control of the railway industry – such as a suicide. There is a potential tension therefore in providing honest and detailed information to passengers, without highlighting the railway as a method of suicide, which could in turn promote imitative behaviour. This research focussed on how best to communicate delays caused by suicide from the perspective of passengers.

Passengers' experiences of suicides on the railway

Passengers, in particular frequent passengers, remember experiencing a number of delays and cancellations on the railway and are aware of a wide range of announcements that are played out at times of disruption. These announcements differ in their perceived frequency and who passengers hold responsible for the incident.

Although frequent travellers have personally experienced delays caused by suicides on the railway, it is important to note that passengers did not tend to associate the railway as a method of committing suicide. If they could recall the current announcement they were unsure if this referred to an accident, suicide or something else. This study also confirmed the view that passengers consider suicides to be largely outside of the rail industry's control and do not 'blame' the industry when they occur.

However, memories of delays caused by suicides are often blurry and most passengers do not remember the exact wording used in announcements, or how they received information about the cause of the delay. In fact the media and fellow passengers play a key role in spreading information about the actual cause of the incident (e.g. that a suicide occurred) as opposed to the announcements they hear. This highlights the importance of ensuring the media are responsible in their reporting of suicides and Samaritans have published media guidelines for this purpose.

*"I know it was a suicide but I'm not sure where I heard it from or what language they used in the announcement to be honest."
London, regular commuter*

Passengers' views on current 'person hit by a train' terminology

Current terminology

Currently, the terminology 'a person hit by a train' is used as standard in cases of suicides and suicide attempts on the railway (though staff may use other words at times). This terminology is also used when a person is hit by a train due to an accident or suspected homicide, and it is used both in cases of fatalities as well as serious incidents that were not fatal. The 'person hit by a train' announcement replaced the previous terminology 'fatality', as this directly referred to death.

Industry stakeholders view the current announcement as clear, honest, and informative. However, at the same time there are concerns that it conjures up a graphic image, can be upsetting to sensitive or vulnerable passengers, and can be decoded as a fatality or a suicide even without overtly referencing it, thereby associating the railway as a site of death or suicide to passengers. However, as there has been little research to date on how passengers actually decode 'person hit by a train' and how they react to this, stakeholders were interested to find out more.

How do passengers decode 'person hit by a train'?

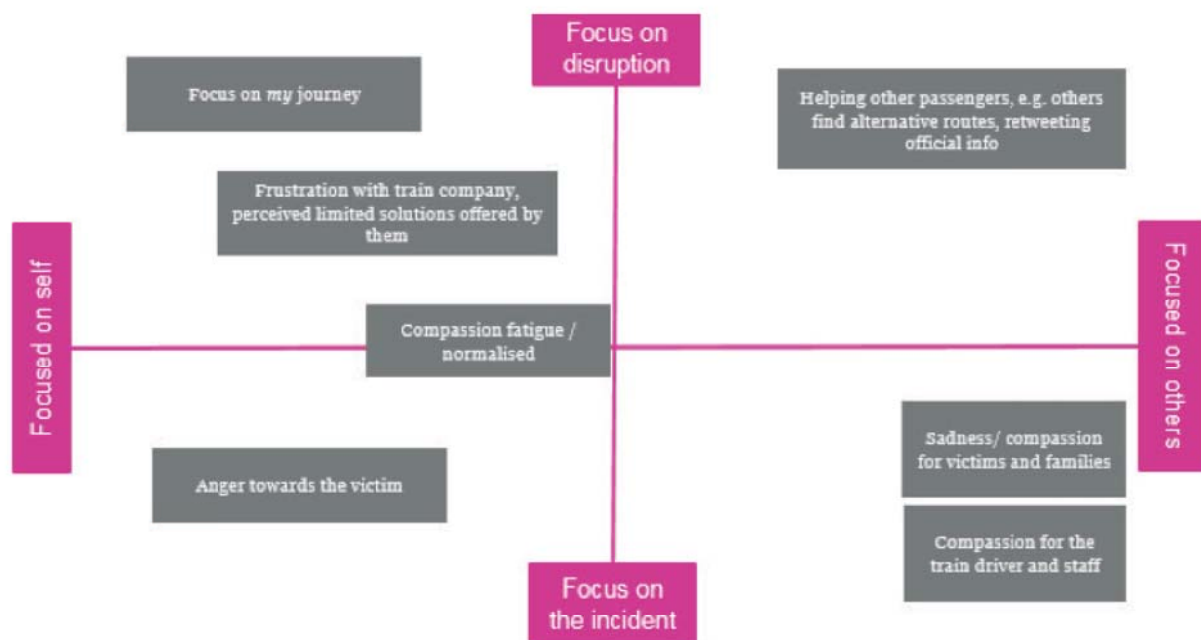
Although suicides and suicide attempts make up the majority of incidents that lead to a 'person hit by a train' being used, the research found that the link is not clear to passengers, especially less regular travellers. The announcement leaves the cause of the incident open; it could be accidental, suicidal, or homicidal. Although some regular travellers assume that 'a person hit by a train' implies a suicide, most believe other causes may have also led to the incident, or do not consider the detail at all.

Interestingly, although the announcement does not refer to a fatality, most assume the person who has been hit by a train would have died due to the impact of the train. A minority felt this could have also resulted in a serious injury. This suggests that the current announcement could have a negative effect, inadvertently suggesting the railway is an effective method of taking one's own life.

Thirdly, the announcement informs passengers that the incident has been serious and long delays are to be expected. There is an understanding that the line is closed due to the incident and that the delay will be long, as the incident is investigated and dealt with.

How do 'person hit by a train' announcements impact passengers emotionally?

Passengers show a range of emotional responses to the announcement. Our analysis of social media responses shows how varied these responses are: some passengers focussed on themselves (e.g. how this would affect their journey), and others on those affected by the incident (e.g. sympathy for the person who has been hit, their family, or the train driver). Some responses relate to the actual incident that has taken place, others to the resulting disruption. We summarise this in the diagram below:



Furthermore, passengers' emotional responses are complex and can be made up of a number of different feelings. In fact, the most common emotional response to the 'person hit by a train' announcement is conflicted – both *compassionate* and *frustrated* at the same time.

Most travellers feel a level of frustration and concern for their own journey; they are frustrated there has been yet another delay and unsure how they will get to their destination. Whilst frustration was common among all passengers, frequent travellers showed a particularly high level of frustration.

At the same time, passengers feel sadness and sympathy towards the victim, often accompanied by a feeling of guilt for being 'selfish'. The mix of emotions conjured up by the announcement is deeply uncomfortable for passengers. Consequently, the announcement is perceived by the majority to be 'too graphic' and to provide too much information regarding the incident. Furthermore, the terminology used in the announcement does not fit with the nature of recorded announcements – passengers feel that using this terminology 'slotted in' to a recorded announcement is inappropriate and cold in tone. Language typically used in announcements (such as "we apologise for the inconvenience") is considered insensitive when used alongside the 'person hit by a train' announcement.

Although a minority feel the 'person hit by a train' announcement is acceptable, it is clear that the majority of passengers would prefer an announcement that provides less 'graphic' information and does not have a negative emotional impact on them or others.

*"Firstly 'not another delay'. My second emotion is of sadness that someone has been 'hit' by a train."
London, regular commuter*

*"[I feel] A bit angry towards the rail company for disclosing the information!"
Manchester, regular commuter*

Exploring alternative terminology

Key considerations

Any alternative terminology introduced to communicate suicides on the railway would need to fit a number of criteria to be appropriate and acceptable in the rail industry.

First, the announcement needs to fit with the principles and needs of TOCs and the industry:

- Honest and transparent communications
- Providing information that passengers need to make alternative plans
- Communicating that the incident is not within the TOC's control (as this can lead to passengers being more sympathetic towards train staff and protects the industry's reputation).

However, at the same time it is important to find alternative terminology with the potential to reduce imitative behaviour:

- Ensure messaging does not get coded as suicide and avoid implying that being hit by a train is likely to cause a fatality
- Avoids specific locations from being seen as hotspots/places to take one's own life.

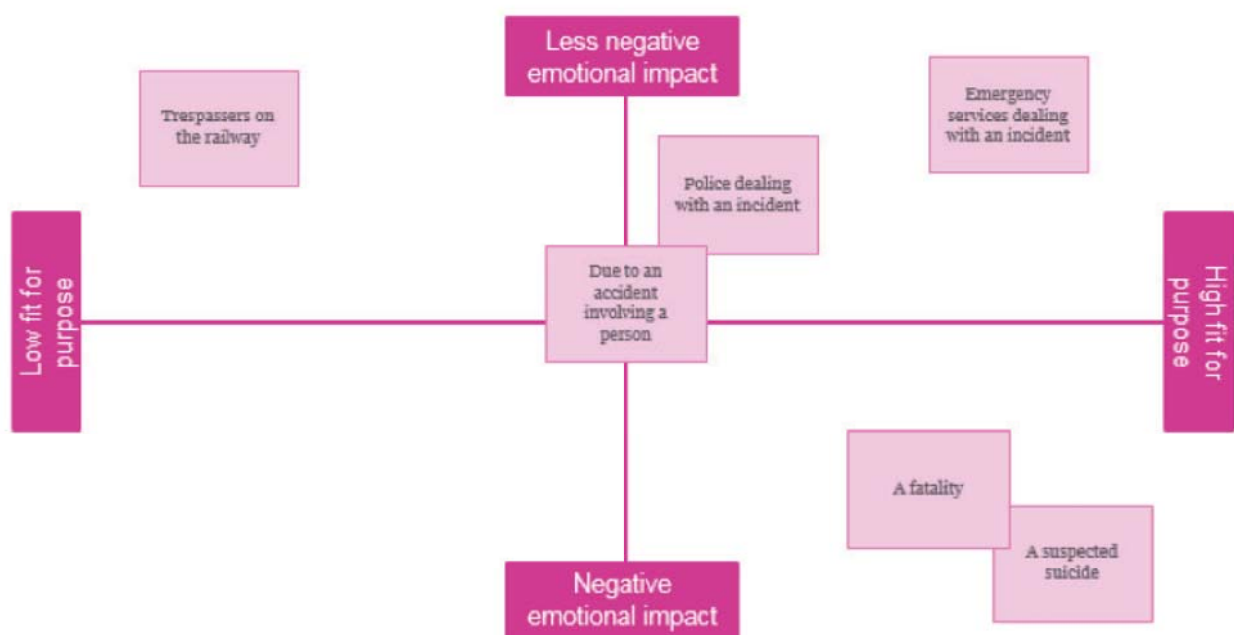
It is important for passengers that any announcement used is fit for purpose – honest and straightforward, without disclosing too much information. It is also important it communicates the seriousness of the issue. However, at the same time passengers also want to ensure the announcement does not have a negative emotional impact – such as sadness, fear, or worry – for themselves or other passengers that might be sensitive to the situation, including children.

Passengers do not however spontaneously consider the effect that the terminology used in announcements might have on imitative behaviour. This is understandable, as many do not particularly associate railways as a common way to take one's life, nor the current announcement with suicide *per se*.

Passengers' reactions to alternative messages

In this research, we explored a range of alternative messages in order to understand what terminology and language could be acceptable or preferred by passengers. A range of alternative messages, including ones that would not be recommended ('a fatality', 'a suspected suicide') were tested in order to explore passengers' attitudes and preferences fully. We have mapped passengers' response to these alternatives on two axes:

1. How fit for purpose or appropriate for communicating suicides they were considered
2. The emotional impact these announcements have on passengers.



Overall responses to these alternative suggestions can be summarised below, in order of passengers' preference for these alternatives:

- 'Emergency services dealing with an incident' is considered honest and it provides the right level of information: it is not graphic or upsetting, whilst still communicating the *seriousness of the issue*
- 'Police dealing with an incident' provides the right level of information but can have the negative effect of causing worry over terrorism and crime
- 'A fatality' is preferred by some due to its honesty and clarity but it is seen as too graphic and detailed by the majority

- ‘Trespassers on the railway’ is considered dishonest and inappropriate for communicating suicides on the railway; it implies a different, and less serious incident has taken place, which may be the fault of the railway. Passengers spontaneous reaction to this announcement is ‘why don’t the train company get them off the line?’
- ‘A suspected suicide’ is seen as far too graphic. Passengers do not want the language of suicide on the railway, and do not feel it is right for TOCs to speculate as to what has happened without confirmation.
- Using the phrase ‘due to an accident’ is not seen as specific enough; it is hard to know what has happened, or how one should respond (e.g. is this a train collision or something else? What will be the duration of delay?)

The research found that honest but less specific alternative messages, such as emergency services dealing with an incident, are preferred over the current ‘person hit by a train’ announcement by passengers. They are also seen as more appropriate as they avoid graphic, potentially distressing, imagery.

The passengers involved in the research who initially expressed a preference for as much transparency as possible in standard announcements (e.g. ‘fatality’) were also prepared to accept less specific messages if further practical information relating to the incident is provided – such as how serious it is, what the likely impact is in terms of duration of delay and what the recommended alternative actions are.

Announcements are made and information is shared via a number of different channels. Overall, passengers’ desire consistency across channels (digital apps and social media, staff, recorded announcements, and information screens) with regards to the level of information provided. Passengers feel staff should use terminology aligned with the recorded announcement in the first instance, but should have the right to explain what has happened tactfully in their own words to those who seek more information. In addition, passengers are open to more information being provided through social media, although they recognise that could have a mass reach and therefore wording needs to be chosen carefully.

Finally, language exists within a dynamic social and cultural context, whereby different individuals may ‘decode’ the terminology used in different ways, and can adapt their understanding if new terms are introduced. Although it is impossible to predict whether ‘emergency services dealing with an incident’ or similar alternatives would get coded as a suicide over time, it is helpful that these types of announcements have a genuine dual meaning and they could be used for a range of other incidents in addition to suicides. For this ‘duality’ to be effective for masking suicides the announcement would have to be actively used to refer to delays caused by a range of circumstances relating to the emergency services.

*“They should just tell us that emergency services are dealing with an incident.
I would be patient, and assume they are doing the best they can.”
Less frequent traveller, Manchester*

The need for location information

The level of information passengers are willing to accept in terms of incident location is another key issue the research explored. This is due to the belief that disclosing the exact location of an incident can lead to an increase in imitative behaviour in that specific location.

This study showed there is a difference in terms of information preferences between regular commuters and less regular travellers. Regular travellers are keen to understand the approximate location of the incident, e.g. "on the x line", or "between x and y" so they can plan their routes around the disruptions. They can have some very tactical measures they can put into play to do so because they are so familiar with the route and alternative options. Whilst less frequent travellers are also somewhat interested in location information, many would prefer to consult train staff over making their own plans based on staff knowledge of the location.

When the issue of imitative behaviour is explained, most passengers are willing to accept train operating companies not mentioning specific locations where possible, such as 'at X station', provided that information regarding the incident location is informative enough for them to make alternative plans, e.g. using wording such as 'between x and y', or recommending alternative routes.

Suicide prevention and reducing imitative behaviour

Passengers' views on imitative behaviour

The rationale behind conducting this research – the opportunity of reducing imitative behaviour through altering announcement terminology and avoiding association with suicide – appeared counterintuitive to most passengers and met with resistance. There is a strong belief that it will be difficult to 'stop' people who are inclined to take their own life through changing announcement terminology. As a result, passengers do not feel confident that changing the terminology used in announcements will make a significant impact on suicide rates on the railway. However, irrespective of that scepticism, the majority of passengers in this research preferred less explicit messages that do not refer to deaths/suicides on the railway anyway.

Suicide prevention

There is a low level of awareness of suicide prevention methods the industry has implemented. For example, suicide prevention barriers at stations are often noticed by passengers but their purpose is not realised, with most assuming these are for general safety and order purposes. Overall, passengers react positively to the fact that train operating companies are trying to reduce suicides on the railway and are particularly positive about the role Samaritans play in working with the railway industry. They also had high level of awareness towards Samaritans posters at railway stations, though they associated these specifically with preventing suicide on the railways only following the focus group discussion – previously they assumed this is a general advertising campaign.

Passengers feel staff can play a key role in preventing suicides on the railway. They see it as important that staff are trained to spot vulnerable people and to deal with those who might be contemplating suicide. Passenger awareness that staff are already being trained in suicide awareness and prevention (with training provided by Samaritans) is low. In fact stakeholders noted that incidents of staff intervening to prevent potential suicides on the railway is rapidly increasing.

Although passengers do not see suicide prevention as first and foremost their responsibility, they feel all have a role to play in creating a better, more compassionate atmosphere at stations and when travelling – and as part of this, helping vulnerable people. Communications campaigns focussed on this broader goal could have potential due to their perceived relevance. Passengers referred spontaneously to similar campaigns they have seen on the London Underground system. They feel it is positive to promote more empathetic behaviour among passengers, with one aspect of this involving looking out for vulnerable or distressed people and knowing whom to alert. Having help points or free-phone lines direct to support available at stations has also been suggested by passengers.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to understand whether passengers would be willing to accept less specific standard announcements than 'person hit by a train' when suicides on the railway are communicated, with a view to reducing imitative behaviour. This study showed that the majority of passengers do not only accept less specific announcements, they would positively prefer them than announcements that indicate death or injury (as 'person hit by a train' does). However, passengers do still expect honesty from train operating companies. Therefore, announcements that are less specific whilst being honest – such as 'emergency services dealing with an incident' – are seen by the majority as the best way to communicate suicides on the railway.

Although passengers have low awareness of the suicide prevention methods that have been implemented by the rail industry and generally do not see a connection between the terminology used in the announcements and suicide rates, they react positively to knowing that the industry is making an effort to reduce suicide rates and collaborate with charities specialising in suicide prevention.

About this research

Truth, are an independent research consultancy. This project was undertaken by staff within the Truth Social group, who specialise in social research on sensitive issues and with vulnerable people.

Network Rail, on behalf of the industry, wished to understand passengers' reactions to how suicides on the railway are currently communicated and how this might be revised.

Transport Focus, the independent transport user watchdog, was approached to commission and manage this qualitative research and build on its existing understanding of how Passenger Information during Disruption (PIDD) is delivered.

Samaritans work to prevent and reduce suicide. In partnership with Network Rail they undertake a range of activities to prevent suicide on the railways including supporting people in distress and training for staff.

A number of stakeholders were consulted to understand the context of the issue, and to inform the research design and we thank them and the research participants for their contribution:

- RAIB (Rail Accident Investigation Branch)
- Scotrail
- TfL (Transport for London)
- The rail industry National Task Force (NTF)
- ATOC (Association of Train Operating Companies)
- Southwest Trains
- BTP (British Transport Police).

Research objectives and methodology

This research was funded by Network Rail on behalf of the rail industry and managed by Transport Focus. This research focussed on understanding passengers' perceptions of the issue of suicides on the railway and how incidents are communicated. It had three overarching objectives:

1. Understanding passengers' experiences of disruption caused by suicides and their attitudes and reactions to it
2. Understanding how passengers react to and interpret current and alternative announcements regarding 'a person hit by a train' or other descriptions of a fatality, and whether passengers would accept messages that do not include any overt or implied reference to a death and which might be less likely to encourage imitative ('copycat') behaviour
3. Exploring passengers' awareness of measures taken by the industry to address and prevent suicides on the railway, and their attitudes towards them.

To address these research questions, we held six focus groups with passengers in two locations (London and Manchester) from across five stations – King's Cross, Waterloo, and Paddington in London, and Piccadilly and Victoria in Manchester. Five groups were with regular commuters and one with less frequent travellers who used the rail network a couple of times a month for leisure or business travel. We wanted to include a diverse range of passengers, and included 23 women, 23 men, people across the age spectrum of 18–67, and 24 White British and 22 Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) passengers in the research. At the outset of the research we also completed seven interviews with industry stakeholders, conducted a desk based review of the terminology used to communicate suicides on the railway internationally, and analysed real-time social media responses to delays caused by suicide on the railway, focusing on eight specific suicide incidents.

COMMUNICATING DELAYS CAUSED BY SUICIDES ON THE RAILWAY

Strategic insight debrief
Prepared for Transport Focus

Ella Majava and
Dr. Carol McNaughton Nicholls

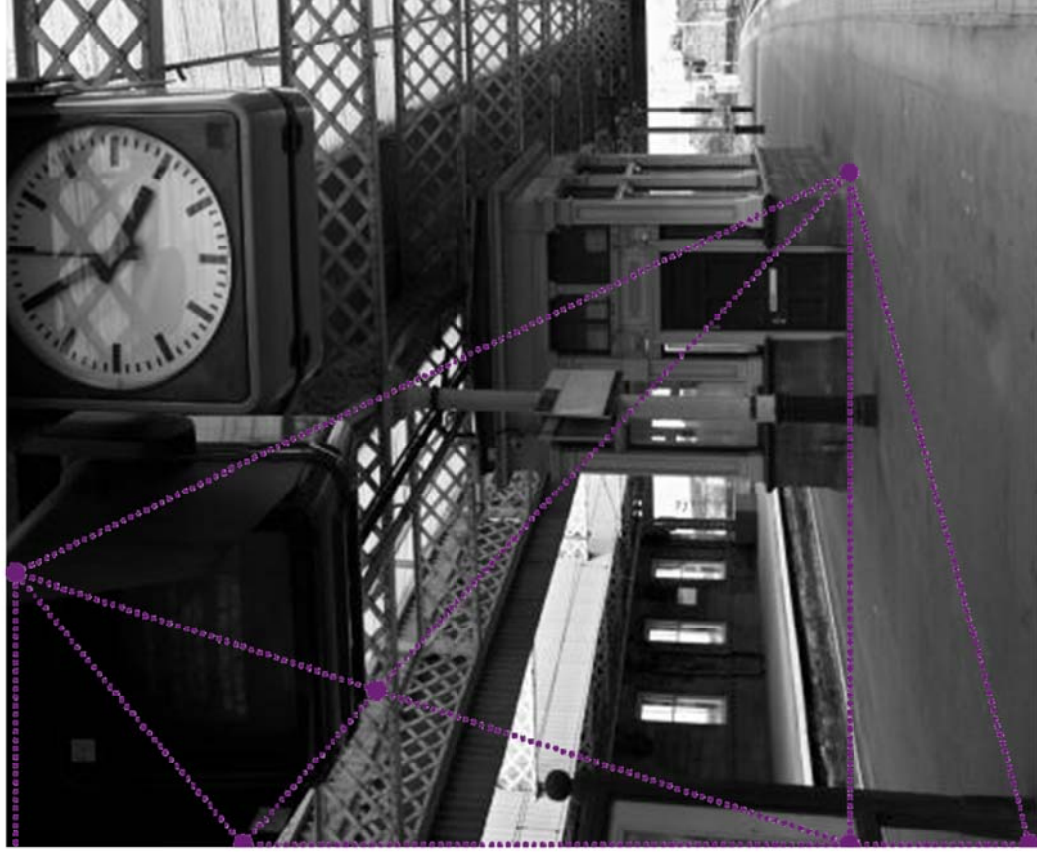
12th May 2015

Truth.

Background and objectives

Truth.

Background



- There were **281 recorded suicides on the railway in 2013/14**

- The way such events are referred to when communicating them on the railway are believed to influence or encourage **imitative behaviour**, with some areas becoming known 'hot spots' and announcements inadvertently 'advertising' the railway as a method of suicide

- Passengers are **more sympathetic to delays** when they know it is due to a serious incident *and* perceive it to be outside of the control of the railway industry - such as suicides. They demand detailed and transparent information when there are delays or disruptions so they can plan their onwards journey. Honesty also promotes their 'trust' in TOCs. However too much information could inadvertently '**advertise**' the railway as a **suicide method**

- Information therefore has to be communicated in such a way that **mitigates the risk** of potentially encouraging imitative behaviour

- And language exists within a dynamic social and cultural context, whereby different individuals may 'decode' the terminology used in different ways, or quickly adapt their understanding if new terms are introduced. In fact, despite an increasing body of international **research on suicide behaviour and suicide prevention** on the railways, there has been little **research exploring passengers' perceptions**

How to communicate delays caused by suicides on the railway is therefore an emotive, impactful and complex issue – and the focus of this research

What do we know about railway suicides

Mishara and Bardon, 2014

Railway suicides consist of a person intentionally putting themselves in the path of a moving train

However it can include other methods such as electrocution. Associated risk factors are usually present such as a note, or history of depression. The first reported railway suicide in the UK was in 1852.

Suicides occur on every rail network in the world

We know a lot about how many, when, where and how people die by suicide on the railways, along with variations by country, location and temporal variations. UK railway suicides rates are lower than most European countries and Japan, but higher than in Australia, Canada and the USA. We know less about why these variations exist, but operational differences and enhanced prevention methods may offer some explanation.

Little is known about why this method is chosen

In general people choose a suicide method that is easily accessible and that they believe will result in a painless, certain and immediate death. Research involving interviews with people who survived their attempt suggest that people are surprised to still be alive; they believed that they would have an immediate, certain and painless death. Only a small minority survive attempted railway suicide however.

There is no evidence that prevention on the railway merely displaces

There is no evidence that preventing suicide on the railway leads to an increase in suicides by other methods or in other locations. However there is an association with railway suicides and proximity to mental health facilities. More broadly there is evidence that disseminating detailed information about suicide methods is associated with an increase in imitative behaviour.

Partners in the research



Network Rail, on behalf of the industry, wished to understand passengers' reactions to how suicides on the railway are currently communicated and how this might be revised.



Transport Focus, the independent transport user watchdog, was approached to commission and manage qualitative research and build on its existing understanding of how Passenger Information during Disruption (PIDD) is delivered.



Samaritans work to prevent and reduce suicide. In partnership with Network Rail they undertake a range of activities to prevent suicide on the railways including supporting people in distress and training for staff.

The objective is to understand passengers' preferred language for communicating suicide on the railway

Specific research questions:

1. Experience and attitudes

- Passengers' experience of disruption caused by suicides including knowledge of procedures to be followed and ways in which they might consider altering their travel plans
- What leads people to trust information provided about disruption and why is some information regarded as meaningless or just a 'standard excuse'
- How passengers react to suicides on the railway and whether their attitude towards the victims is one of compassion or of contempt for having their journey delayed

2. Messaging and channels

- How passengers react to and interpret current and alternative announcements regarding 'a person hit by a train' or other descriptions of a fatality
- Whether passengers would accept messages that do not include any overt or implied reference to a death and which might be less likely to encourage 'copy-cat' behaviour
- Differences in passengers' reactions to information provided through announcements at stations or on trains, on social media or through other means
- The credibility of any proposed messages and the likely impact on passengers' trust in the message and the organisation seen as delivering it

3. Prevention

- Passengers' awareness of measures taken by the industry to address suicides including Network Rail's partnership with the Samaritans
- Passengers' likely reaction to being asked to work with the railway to reduce suicides on the network; for example, how would they react to a campaign to look out for 'vulnerable' people at stations and report them to a member of staff or the British Transport Police (BTP)?

Project overview

	<u>Creative insight</u>	<u>Stakeholder interviews</u>	<u>Focus groups</u>	<u>Face to face debrief and written report</u>
<u>Key activities</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial kick off Desk review - review research and online discussions Social media listening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 x telephone depth interviews Including 1 x core interview with Samaritans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 x focus groups, in-depth exploration of key research questions Purposively sampled – symbolically representative of commuter population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis Presentation and report creation
<u>Key outputs</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align and define key objectives Situate communicating suicide within cultural understanding Map current terminology 'Real time' data minimising social desirability bias 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploration of research objectives Input into the qualitative discussion guide development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify emotional and normative response to key terms Collect suggestions for alternative terms Test terms within various scenarios Exploration of knowledge, experience and attitudes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written PowerPoint report and a 5 – 6 page management summary Presentation

Stakeholder organisations consulted



SAMARITANS

SOUTH WEST TRAINS



**Transport
for London**

NATIONAL TASK FORCE

Research sample

We held six groups in London and Manchester

<u>Group</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>Tertiary criteria (monitor and ensure diversity)</u>
Group 1 and 2 Waterloo and Kings Cross Stations Venue: Viewing facility	Across both groups: Male: 6 Female: 7	Across both groups: 18 – 30 years: 4 31 – 47 years: 6 48 – 67 years: 3	Across both groups White British: 6 Other (Black minority ethnic, BME): 7	Rail use (commuter only)
Group 3 and 4 Paddington Station Venue: Hotel function room	Male: 9 Female: 7	18 – 30 years: 5 31 – 47 years: 6 48 – 67 years: 5	White British: 4 Other (Black minority ethnic, BME): 12	Rail use (commuter only)
Group 5 and 6 Manchester Piccadilly Station Venue: Hotel function room	Male: 8 Female: 9	18 – 30 years: 5 31 – 47 years: 8 48 – 67 years: 4	White British: 14 Other (Black minority ethnic, BME): 3	Group 5: Rail use (commuter only) Group 6: Non commuter, regular rail traveller
Total	Male: 23 Female: 23	18 – 30 years: 14 30 – 47 years: 20 48 – 67 years: 12	White British: 24 Other (Black minority ethnic, BME): 22	

Demographic breakdown of all participants

Gender		Ethnicity		Age		Location	
Male:	23	White British:	24	18 - 30 years old	14	London:	29
Female:	23	BME:	22	31 - 47 years old	20	Manchester:	17
				48 – 67 years old	12		
Total							46

Ethnic minority breakdown	5
Indian:	5
Other Black:	1
Black Caribbean:	3
Black African:	3
Other mixed:	3
Pakistani:	3
Other white:	1
Other Ethnic group (incl. European, Portuguese)	3

Stakeholders confirmed there is a tension between providing honest information and preventing imitative behaviour

The need for honesty & transparency

- TOCs and rail industry bodies have a desire to inform customers, and to be transparent with them – this is one of their core communications principles
- At the same time they also have a need to ensure their reputation is guarded; i.e. suicides on the railway aren't announced in a way that risks impacting the reputation of the rail system and passengers' trust in it, through implying that the incident was within their control
- There is also anecdotal evidence that passengers feel calmer when the cause of delay is announced in the case of suicides, meaning less pressure or risk to already burdened train staff
- However, TOCs understand sometimes there could be a good reason to not be completely transparent and disclose full details of an incident, e.g. to avoid upsetting passengers or when this is for the general good

The need for vague messaging to prevent imitative behaviour

- There is a perception that suicide via the railway is an effective means, but it also leads to injuries and not necessarily death
- Stakeholders want to get away from an announcement that communicates these two points, in order to avoid 'advertising' the railway as a means of taking one's own life:
 - It is effective (e.g. fatality)
 - Where it happened (disruption due to a person by a train at...)

Stakeholders also identified potential barriers to changing announcement terminology, as well as drivers for doing so

Barriers to implementation

- Some see it as difficult for the rail industry to agree on one specific message due to the number of train operators – although industry steering groups are in place, and they provide a platform for discussion and debate among TOCs
- In addition to official announcements, train crew might also announce something different after the shock of the event, and use their own wording. In addition, many rail staff have worked at TOCs for decades and are used to calling suicides fatalities or suicides. They have found this helps them keep passengers on platforms calm so they resort to it as a fallback response
- Train operating companies might be reluctant to implement messaging that could be deemed dishonest and that could cause a potential backlash among passengers

Drivers for change

- Announcements have very wide reach, and media and social media exacerbate this. e.g. analysis by BTP has shown one incident at Wimbledon had a reach of 9 million people - this means getting announcements right is very important
- Reducing the number of suicides on the railway would cause fewer delays, and ultimately more satisfied customers
- Finding an announcement that has an impact on suicide rates would lead to reduced trauma for train staff and also reduce time off duty by train drivers who have been affected by an incident

However, the most motivating factor for the majority of stakeholders is the ability to save human lives through their efforts...

“There are a lot of factors involved when it comes to suicides. However, we as an industry need to get our little bit right, as it could save human lives.”

Stakeholder

“If we can save even one life, it will have been worth it.”

Stakeholder

Executive summary

Truth.



Headlines (1)

1

Passengers' recall of suicides on the railway is blurred, but it is clear that the media and conversations among passengers plays a key role in spreading information about the nature of an incident

- Media and conversations among passengers often play a part in spreading information about the cause of the incident (i.e. that it was a suicide). Some passengers also have received details about the incident (that the incident was a suicide) from train staff

2

Passengers' response to the current 'person hit by a train' announcement is negative and triggers mixed emotions of frustration and sadness

- Most passengers react to the 'person hit by a train' announcement with a mix of both frustration (due to the disruption to their own journey) and compassion and concern (for those affected)
- The majority of passengers feel the announcement provides too much – and too graphic – detail about the nature of the incident

3

When it comes to communicating suicides on the railway, the majority of passengers would prefer an announcement that doesn't disclose full details about the incident, whilst remaining honest

- The majority of passengers would prefer an announcements that does not refer to fatalities or injuries, and doesn't have a negative emotional impact on them - they do not want the gravitas and personal nature of the incident to be discounted however

Headlines (2)

4

Passengers prefer 'emergency services dealing with an incident' as an announcement when suicidal behaviour/ fatalities occur on the railway

- Passengers feel this announcement provides the appropriate level of detail to indicate the gravitas of the situation, and it is honest and appropriate for serious incidents such as suicides

5

It is difficult for passengers to understand the issue of imitative behaviour in all of its complexity

- The idea that avoiding explicitly or implicitly mentioning fatalities on the railway could prevent suicides on the railway is counterintuitive to passengers; it goes against the more intuitive view they hold that “people who want to do it will find a way”
- Some aspects of the issue – e.g. avoiding naming specific locations – are easier to understand and accept

6

Passengers have low awareness of suicide prevention methods that the rail industry has implemented but are positive towards them

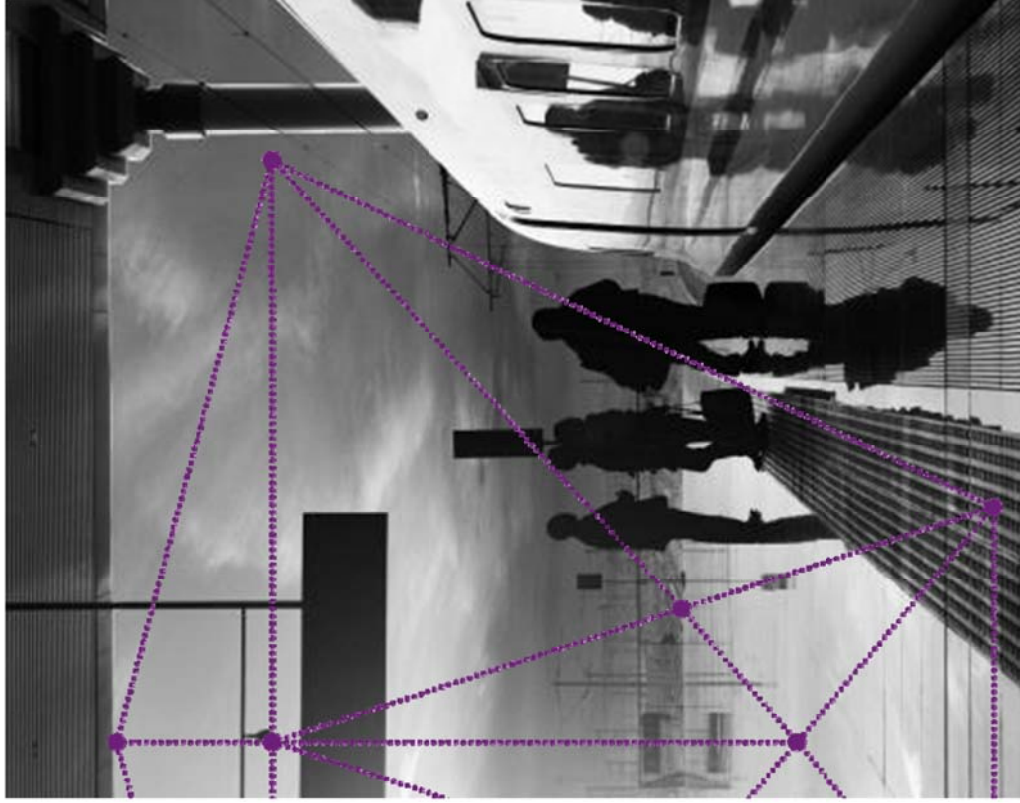
- Most passengers aren't aware of prevention methods that the railway has implemented, and are positively surprised that Network Rail, TOCs and industry bodies have put so much effort into suicide prevention
- Passengers also feel positive about Samaritans' involvement and the messages they send to passengers through their posters and their presence at stations



Passengers' experiences of delays

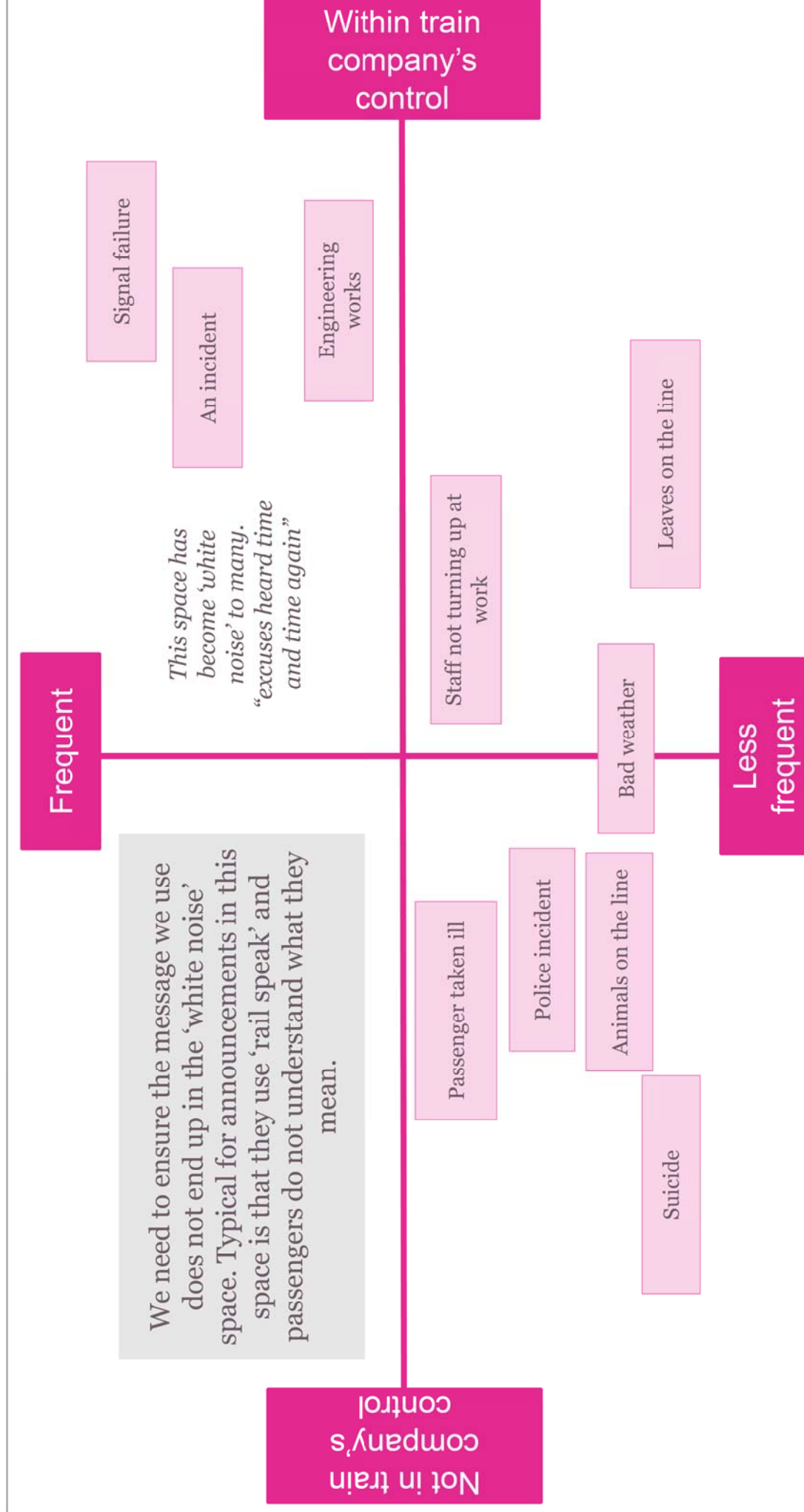
Truth.

Passengers have experienced delays and more frequent cancellations feel they are ‘common’ on the railway in Britain



- International comparisons have shown that railways in Britain aren't performing poorly in a comparative context
 - However, passengers' perception is that delays and cancellations are too common and the railway system in Britain is notorious for delays
 - Most passengers have experienced delays and cancellations – in particular, frequent travellers
 - Frequent travellers are more likely to feel that the TOCs are not doing all they can to solve issues; less frequent travellers are more likely to feel that train companies are doing the best they can
 - The expectation of passengers is for TOCs to solve all issues that lead to delays and that are predictable; and those that happen frequently enough for them to take action against even if not their fault directly, e.g. weather
-
- **Passengers have experiences of delays and cancellations, and have heard a range of announcements**
 - **Announcements differ in their perceived frequency and who passengers then 'blame' for the incident**
 - **Their priority is to plan what to do in response**

Passengers have heard a range of announcements in times of disruption



However, passengers agree that any announcement is preferable to none

*“The worst is when they give
you no information at all.
They just say delayed or
cancelled. Or nothing at all.”*

Regular commuter, London

The information passengers require and what they perceive to be available do not always marry up

Information needs during disruption

Passengers would like to receive information about the delay, its expected length, alternative routes and ways forward. Knowing about what has happened is interesting too – for most simply out of curiosity and for some to share with people they communicate their delay to.

1

How long is this likely to last?

2

Should I make an alternative plan?

3

What is the best alternative plan?

4

What's happened? What is the cause?

Perceptions of information received

Passengers perceive the only information they receive is about the cause of the delay; this is often used to draw conclusions about the expected length of delay, whether an alternative plan is needed, what alternative routes are best.

What's happened?
What is the cause?

How long is this likely to last?

Should I make an alternative plan?

What is the best alternative plan?



Passengers are used to using the key information they do receive / notice (i.e. the cause of the incident) to make their own 'guesstimates' regarding the best plan of action. However they would prefer better information directly from TOCs.

Truth.

Responses to 'person hit by a train'

Truth.



Memories of delays caused by suicides are often blurry and many passengers don't remember hearing the 'person hit by a train' wording in the past. Stories told by media and information shared by other passengers shape passengers' understanding of what has happened.

"I know it was a suicide but I'm not sure where I heard it from or what language they used it in the announcement to be honest."

London, regular commuter

"I think it was the people on the train who told me that it actually had been a suicide. Someone had found out, and it was in the local paper the following day."

London, regular commuter

The ‘person hit by a train’ announcement replaced ‘fatality’ with the aim of avoiding implying death

There are mixed opinions among stakeholders on the current terminology, ‘person hit by a train’.

Positives

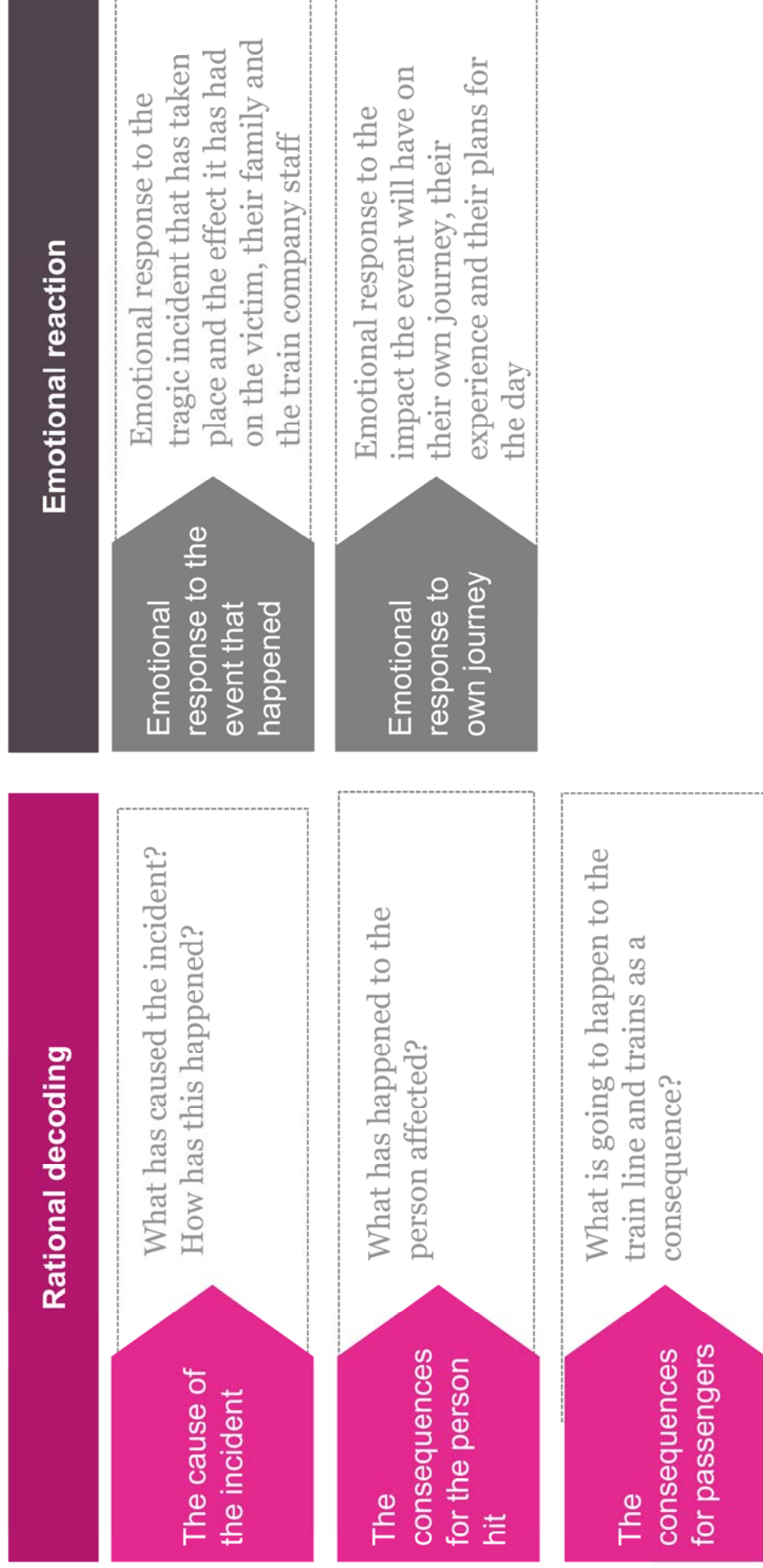
- It’s clear and easy to understand
- It is honest and transparent
- It does not directly imply there has been a fatality; leaves it ambiguous whether the person hit by a train has died as a result of the incident

Negatives

- Can conjure up a graphic image
- Could be upsetting to sensitive passengers / those with personal experiences of suicide / death
- Could be decoded as a fatality or a suicide without overtly referencing them

There has been little research to date, beyond anecdotal evidence, on how passengers actually decode ‘person hit by a train’, whether they assume it implies a fatality/suicide and what its emotional impact on passengers is.

Upon hearing the ‘person hit by a train’ announcement, passengers decode the message rationally and react emotionally



The rational decoding of what has happened leads most to think there has been a fatality, although not necessarily a suicide

An assumption that the incident would have led to a fatality

- Although the announcement does not refer to a fatality, most assume the person hit by a train would have died due to the impact of the train
- Whilst most assume that 'person hit by a train' implies a fatality, a minority felt this could have also resulted in a serious injury or an accident (e.g. a coat caught in the train)

An understanding that there will be severe delays as the line is closed

- There is an understanding that the line is closed due to the incident and that the delay will be long
- Passengers do understand that the incident needs to be investigated, the body removed from the track and the rail staff involved may need to be relieved of their duties

An unclear understanding of how it happened

- The announcement leaves the cause of the incident open; it could be accidental, suicidal, or homicidal
- Some regular travellers will assume that the most likely cause would be a suicide but most consider other causes could have also led to the incident or do not consider the detail at all

“Either suicide or children on line?”
Manchester, non-commuter

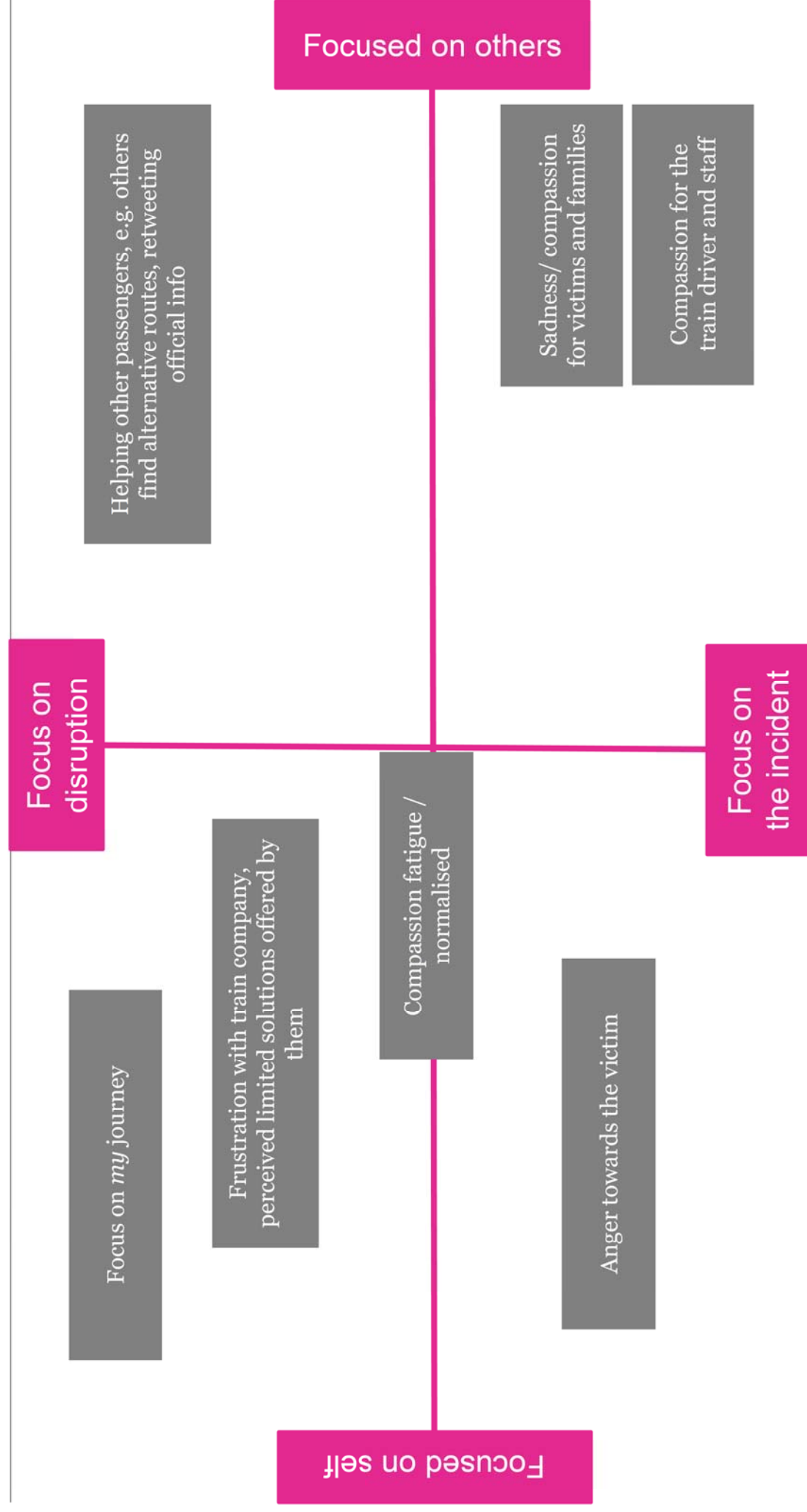
“Crikey - a person hit by a train - how did that happen?”
Manchester, non-commuter

“What were they doing on the track?”
London, regular commuter

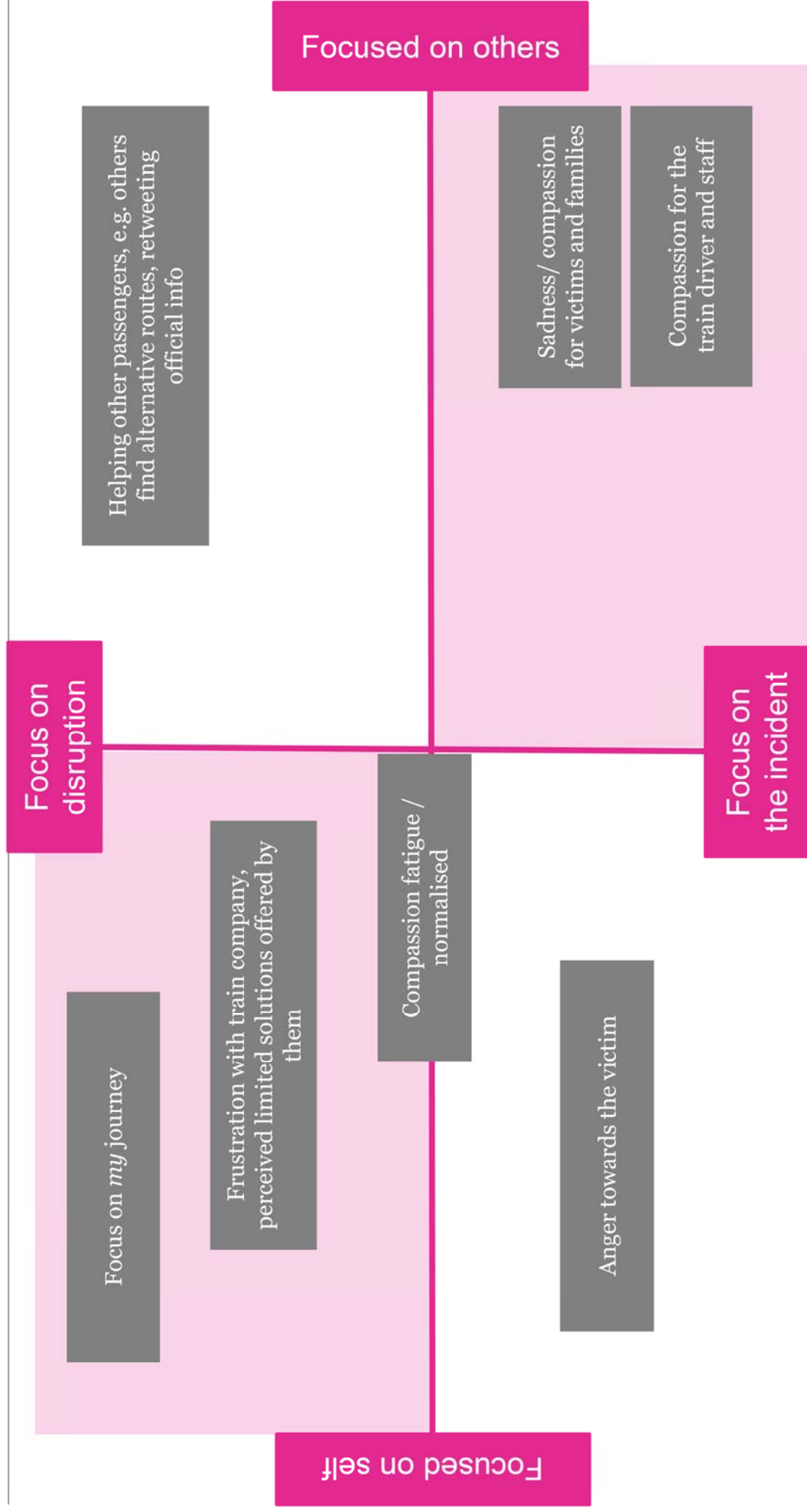


The rational decoding leads to realisation that a serious, tragic, out of the ordinary event has taken place.

Social media listening revealed a range of real time emotional responses to suicides on the railway



Focus groups research showed the most common emotional reaction to this tragic event incorporates two conflicting emotions



The most common emotional reaction to this tragic event is conflicted – both compassionate *and* frustrated

Frustration

Most travellers feel a level of frustration and concern for their own journey. They are frustrated there has been yet another delay, and unsure how they will get to their destination

- Whilst frustration was common among all passengers, frequent travellers showed a higher level of frustration
- Those who were regular travellers noted themselves that they were becoming desensitised to this type of message; they felt bad about it but contextualised it within the stress of the journey

Sadness and sympathy

...At the same time, they feel sadness and sympathy towards the victim, often accompanied by a feeling of guilt for being so 'selfish'

- The tragic nature of the event leads to an involuntary feeling of sadness and makes passengers reflect on the event
- Infrequent travellers are further upset by the frustrated reaction of frequent traveller to the announcement (and perception it is a suicide)

"Frustrated - then a bit guilty for feeling frustrated it was suicide - but if it was, why weren't there staff around to help avoid this situation?"

Guess it's not the staff's fault really..."

London, regular commuter

"Sad news but also concerned by how this will impact my journey."

London, regular commuter

"Firstly 'not another delay'. My second emotion is of sadness that someone has been 'hit' by a train."

London, regular commuter

The current recorded announcement feels too ‘cold’ for a serious incident; it doesn’t respect the emotional response passengers have

- The recorded announcement feels ‘cold’ and mechanical to passengers – the fact that the ‘person hit by a train’ phrase has simply been slotted into a standard announcement feels inappropriate for such a tragic event
- Passengers would prefer messages from staff / humans when serious incidents such as ‘person hit by a train’ happen
- Additional wording around the ‘person hit by a train’ announcement, for example apologising for the inconvenience, seems appropriate in a tragic situation such as ‘person hit by a train’

-
- **Although the majority would expect an announcement about serious and sad events to ‘respect’ the nature of the event and reflect the tragic nature of it, this approach has the drawback of emphasising feelings of sadness among customers and making the emotional conflict more intense**

“Another computer generated robotic voice lacking empathy and comes across insincere.”

London, regular commuter

“Better to be announced by a human rather than computer.”

London, regular commuter

“What a mechanical voice!”

Manchester, non-commuter

“Cynical about ‘the inconvenience’ message because somebody is dead or injured”

London, regular commuter

Passengers would like this conflict to be resolved by TOCs providing less information about the incident in the standard announcement

- The announcement is perceived by the majority to be too graphic and to provide too much information regarding the incident – it can lead to feeling upset and sad. There were no differences by ethnicity or gender; the announcement was consistently perceived negatively
- In particular, passengers feel this message could have a negative impact on passengers travelling with children, or passengers with personal experiences of suicides in their family or circle of friends. They also spoke of being upset by other passengers' angry and unsympathetic responses to the announcement
- A minority (frequent travellers, London) feel this announcement is acceptable; however, some are conscious they have become desensitised to these types of messages due to encountering them frequently

-
- **The majority of passengers would prefer an announcement that provides less 'graphic' information and does not have a negative emotional impact on them**

"The announcement was too in depth stating 'hit by a train', as this may upset some passengers who may have family history of suicide etc."

Manchester, non-commuter

"A bit angry towards the rail company for disclosing the information!"

Manchester, regular commuter

"Too graphic information."

London, regular commuter

"Oh dear! A bit too much information."

London, regular commuter

Responses to alternative messages

Truth.

Stakeholders feel any alternative message would need to meet a number of important criteria

Rail industry reputation

Honest

- TOCs have highlighted the importance of honesty and transparency in their communications
- However, they are happy to leave out some information if it is for a good cause

Informative

- Needs to communicate a long delay
- Provide information that passengers need to make alternative plans
- Looking after and informing customers

Not TOC's fault

- Customers must not think that the rail companies are incompetent and at fault when the incident is not within their control

Suicide prevention

Messaging doesn't get coded as suicide

- Avoid associating railway as a 'successful' method of taking one's life

Avoid implying a fatality

- Avoid implying that being hit by a train is likely to cause a fatality

Avoid any specific locations

- Messaging avoids any specific locations from being seen as hotspots / good places to take one's own life

By contrast, passengers judge announcements by a simpler set of criteria

Fit for purpose

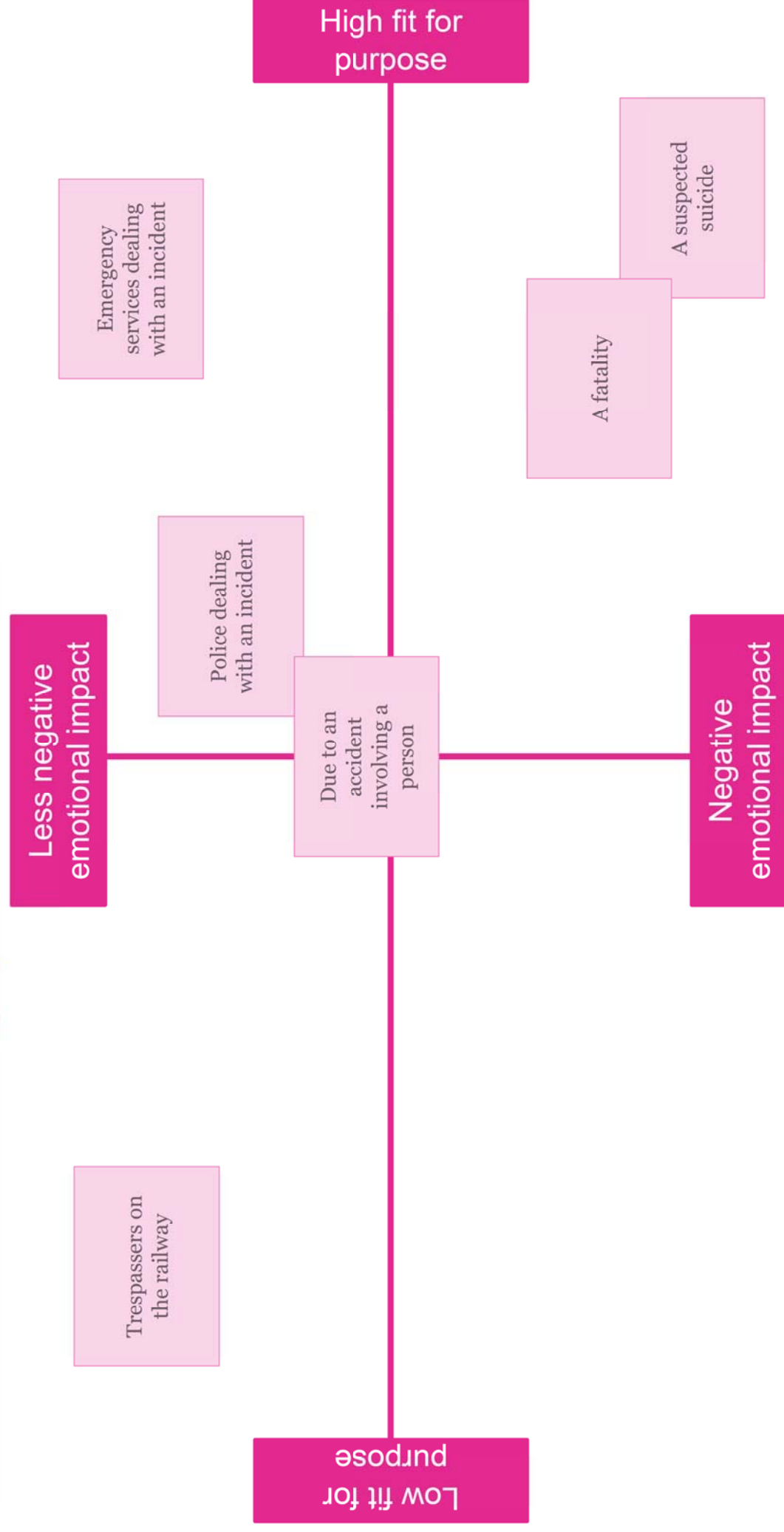
Passengers want an announcement that is fit for purpose - honest without disclosing too much information, and that communicates the seriousness of the issue

Emotional impact

Passengers want an announcement that minimises the emotional impact it has on them (sadness, fear, worry) and doesn't cause emotional reactions

Reducing the number of suicides on the railway / imitative behaviour is not a consideration passengers spontaneously think of. Many don't even particularly associate railways as a common way to take one's own life nor the current announcement with suicide per se.

Mapping alternative messages against passengers' key criteria shows there are some alternatives with high potential



Rationale for response

Emergency services dealing with an incident

Emergency services dealing with an incident is seen to provide the right level of information. It isn't graphic or upsetting, whilst still communicating the *seriousness* of the issue.

Passenger criteria	Stakeholder criteria
Fit for purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This announcement feels right for communicating suicides, as passengers assume that emergency services would investigate the incident; it is genuine• It communicates the seriousness of the incident	Rail industry reputation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The message communicates that something out of the ordinary has happened• The announcement does not come across as an excuse by train companies due to reference to third parties / authorities
Emotional impact <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The emotional impact of this announcement is low due to the fact that emergency services could refer to a number of incident types, police, fire fighters etc. The lack of detail about the incident means less vivid images and strong emotions are conjured up	Suicide reduction <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The message makes no overt references to suicides or fatalities, and does not imply that there has been a fatality as a result of the incident

Rationale for response

Police dealing with an incident

Police dealing with an incident is liked due to the level of information it provides, however had the negative effect of causing fear over e.g. terrorism and crime among some.

Passenger criteria

Fit for purpose

- This announcement seems somewhat appropriate, as passengers understand that police could be called to investigate an incident

Emotional impact

- This announcement can cause negative feelings of fear as passengers can decode a police investigation to imply a threat of crime or terrorism

Stakeholder criteria

Rail industry reputation

- Although the announcement places no blame on the TOCs, it can have a negative association with crime / terrorism
- Stakeholders have also suggested that this message could be considered too vague by passengers

Suicide reduction

- The announcement does not imply there has been a fatality; but depending on its usage (if it were to be only used for fatalities on the railway), could become known as 'code for suicide'

Detailed Response

A fatality

A fatality was preferred by some but seen as too graphic and detailed by others. Those preferring this message did so due to its clarity, honesty and simplicity.

Passenger criteria

Fit for purpose

- This announcement is clear, and it honestly expressed what has happened
- It is seen as suitable for all types of fatalities, including suicides (passengers don't need to know the suicidal intent behind the incident)

Emotional impact

- This announcement feels tragic and upsetting to passengers – regardless of whether they decode it as a suicide, or they are left wondering how the incident happened (accident, suicide, homicide?)

Stakeholder criteria

Rail industry reputation

- This message is seen as honest and transparent
- The announcement suggests that the rail companies are not to blame for this incident (most do not assume that the fatality was result of an accident that TOCs are to blame for)

Suicide reduction

- The announcement explicitly states the incident has had fatal consequences, potentially inadvertently suggesting the railway is an effective suicide method
- However passenger did not necessarily decode it in this way

Detailed Response

Trespassers on the railway

Trespassers on the railway was considered dishonest and inappropriate for communicating suicides on the railway.

Passenger criteria	Stakeholder criteria
<p>Fit for purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This announcement is seen as dishonest• The image it conjures up is 'kids messing around'. This doesn't communicate how serious the event has been (or how serious the delays will be)	<p>Rail industry reputation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Passengers would feel the TOCs hadn't been honest with them if they were to find out a suicide had been communicated as 'trespassers on the railway'
<p>Emotional impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This announcement does not cause feelings of sadness but creates further anger and frustration among some passengers	<p>Suicide reduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The announcement makes no overt references to fatalities or suicides, and has a genuine 'dual meaning'

Rationale for response

A suspected suicide

A suspected suicide was seen as far too graphic. Passengers don't want language of suicide on the railway.

Passenger criteria

Fit for purpose

- This announcement gives you the full details of the incident
- Many feel that the TOCs should not be speculating (using the word 'suspected') but only provide facts to passengers

Emotional impact

- This announcement, similar to 'a fatality', makes passengers feel upset
- Again, this announcement leads to a conflicting emotional response (frustration about one's journey combined with compassion)

Stakeholder criteria

Rail industry reputation

- The announcement suggests that the delay was out of TOCs' control
- However, including speculation ('suspected') in the announcements would not reflect well on the rail industry

Suicide reduction

- The announcement has high potential to suggest that the railway is an effective suicide method

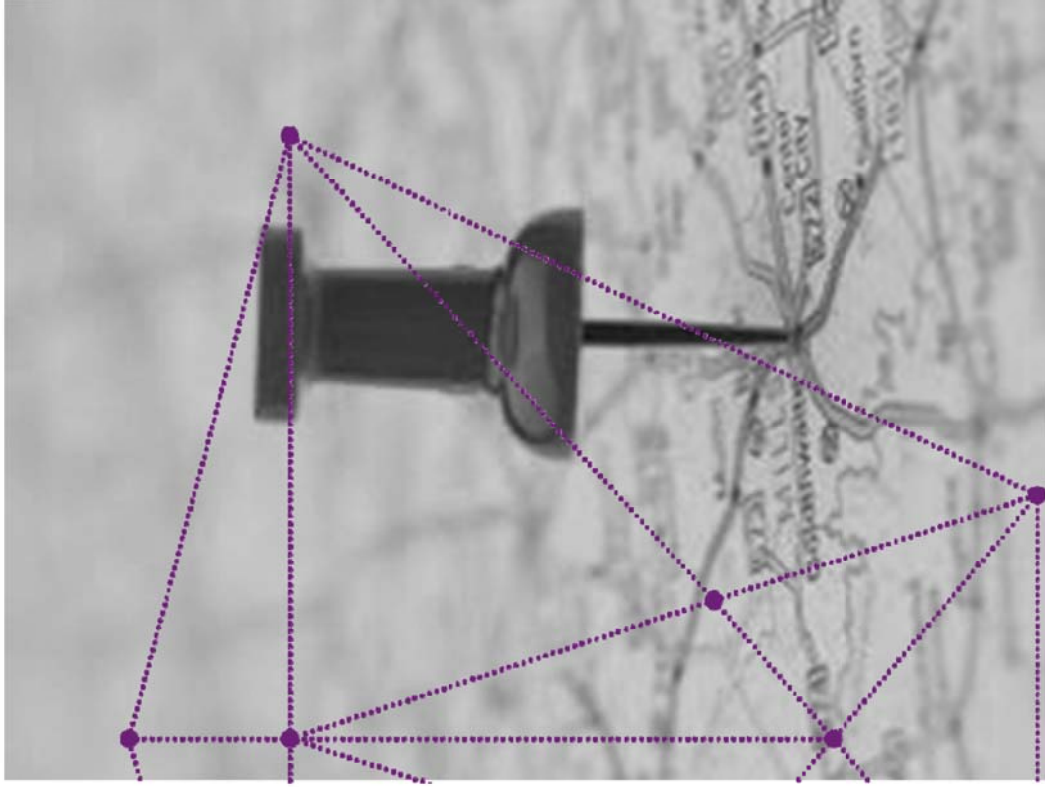
Rationale for response

An accident involving a person

The language of accident is felt to be too vague by most, though preferred by some; it is hard to know what has happened, or how one should respond.

Passenger criteria	Stakeholder criteria
Fit for purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none">The announcement is considered somewhat appropriate – at the time of it occurring they may not even know if it is a fatality and it indicates the seriousness	Rail industry reputation <ul style="list-style-type: none">The announcement suggests that the delay was out of TOCs' control
Emotional impact <ul style="list-style-type: none">The announcement causes some feelings of sadness and concern; the accident could have been grave - although these are milder than those caused by 'hit by'Could conjure images of rail accidents	Suicide reduction <ul style="list-style-type: none">The announcement refers to injury to people, and could therefore inadvertently become associated with suicides but was not immediately by passengers

Information about incident location helps passengers plan alternative routes



- Regular travellers are keen to understand the approximate location of the incident, e.g. “on the x line”, or “between x and y” so they can plan route around the disruption
 - Whilst less frequent travellers are also interested in location information, many would prefer to consult train staff over making their own plans based on the knowledge of the location
 - The information provided needs to be specific enough to allow for planning alternative routes, e.g. ‘near London’ is considered so vague it is not actually helpful
 - When the issue of copycat behaviour was introduced, most passengers are willing to accept that train operating companies refrain from mentioning specific locations where possible, as long as information provided regarding the incident location is informative enough for them to make alternative plans / if more information is provided regarding recommended alternative routes
-
- **Whilst passengers are open to the specific location of an incident not being disclosed, their preference is for a level of information that does allow for planning alternative routes**
 - **They suggested the wording ‘between x and y’**

Passengers less willing to accept vaguer messages from standard announcements are more likely to do so if further journey information is provided

Those preferring to know the incident was a fatality or less prepared to accept vague messages would be more likely to do so provided further journey information relating to the incident is provided.

Severity of delay

If the delay is likely to be severe or not is a crucial piece of information. Passengers spontaneously suggest a system where TOCs let them know the severity on a scale, e.g. 1-2-3 or minor/severe scale (although scales and associated delays would need to be clear to passengers)

Alternative routes

More information on alternative routes would help passengers accept less information about the location of the incident; however, this needs to be readily available

Length of delays

Passengers are interested in understanding the length of the delay. However, they are sceptical about this type of information provided by TOCs as their past experiences have shown it is not always reliable

Could 'emergency services dealing with an incident' become a code for suicides over time?

Although it is hard to predict the future and whether a message becomes a code for suicide over time – as this depends on media usage and staff communications among other factors – there are three factors working in its favour.

A genuine dual meaning

The announcement genuinely encompasses a number of different potential incidents, e.g. a fire, a serious accident, a traffic accident

Familiarity

The message has been heard before by passengers; it wouldn't strike them as completely new.

A clear meaning

Again, the clarity of the announcement means that passengers don't need to think about what it means and are likely to simply accept it and move on

Passengers' priority is the level of information they receive and its usefulness

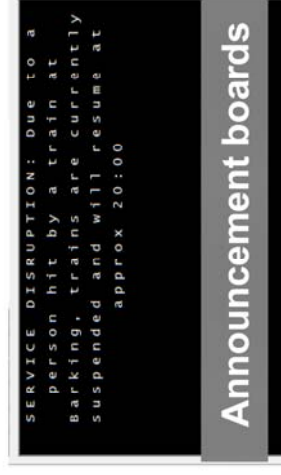
Passengers desire **consistency of information** – but feel the appropriate language to communicate suicide can **differ across channels** and context



Staff



Announcements



Announcement boards



Social media and apps

- Passengers expect a degree of humanity/more information from staff directly; this could include disclosing the nature of the incident ('person hit by a train') to passengers who request to know what has happened
- This protects passengers who **don't want** to know about the incident, but also allows staff to calm passengers who may be angry due to the delay
- Passengers feel there needs to be a consistently used message in standard announcements
- Announcements 'interrupt' passengers all at the same time; therefore a message that isn't too graphic is considered particularly important for this channel. Passengers cannot 'avoid' these announcements even if they want to (e.g. they are travelling with a child and don't want them to know someone has been hit)
- Passengers feel announcement boards need to provide **information consistent** with other channels – they feel information is limited to simply 'delayed' or 'cancelled' - but boards also cannot be avoided and the language used in the announcement therefore should be the same as is used for the recorded announcement
- Some travellers use social media and apps to stay updated, but some also stressed they don't
- There is an understanding that train companies cannot control what passengers say about incidents on social media but regardless of this passengers feel the train company should still use consistent language to communicate a suicide that does not refer to someone being hit by a train

So passengers are open to and expect to hear more detailed information from staff and/or when looking for it online



Information hierarchy

A conversation with a staff member

Passengers feel staff should use terminology aligned with the recorded announcement in the first instance, but should have the right to explain what has happened in their own words and tactfully to those who do demand more information. Passenger trust staff's discretion to disclose further details about the incident to those who wish to know what has happened.

An informative approach online

When seeking information online, passengers want to be able to understand the impact on their journey and be directed to alternatives. Passengers feel social media has the potential to have a mass reach and therefore wording used should be considered carefully. Consistency with recorded announcements is preferred by passengers.

Broad mass announcements (recorded on boards)

Passengers feel that wording used in mass announcement should be kept less explicit, as passengers don't have control over whether they hear this message or not, and it has the potential to upset them. The fact these announcements are also heard by children and people feeling vulnerable means choosing the wording carefully is even more important.

And passengers' expectations about this hierarchy enables them to choose how much information about the incident they obtain

Imitative behaviour

Truth.



Although passengers and train operating companies have different motivations, their preferences are aligned

The majority of passengers prefer less explicit messages that do not refer to deaths / suicides on the railway, albeit for different reasons than the rail industry.

- The preferences of passengers are aligned with recommended announcement terminology – they don't feel the need to know the details about the incident, and in fact prefer not knowing a fatality has taken place
- Most passengers react positively to the fact that train operating companies are trying to reduce suicides on the railway
- However, the issue of imitative behaviour is counterintuitive to most passengers. Passengers do not feel confident that changing the terminology used in announcements will make a significant impact on suicide rates on the railway

The issue of imitative behaviour is complex with many different layers, and the core issue is counterintuitive and difficult to grasp

Different ideas related to imitative behaviour

Comprehension

The core issue

Changing the announcement to one that doesn't explicitly nor implicitly imply any fatalities on the railway can reduce the number of suicides

- The idea seems counterintuitive to most; there is a strong belief that 'if people want to do it they will find a way to do so' which is difficult to overcome. The idea goes against a fundamental belief in self efficacy and agency (that we can achieve outcomes we set out to achieve)
- Some also felt that the idea was condescending, "nanny state"

Simpler arguments

Explicitly mentioning the word suicide might trigger vulnerable people

- At the simplest level, passengers are willing to understand and accept that using the word suicide directly might lead to imitative behaviour. However, the issue gets more complex when using words such as fatality

Mentioning specific locations can lead to these being classified as hotspots

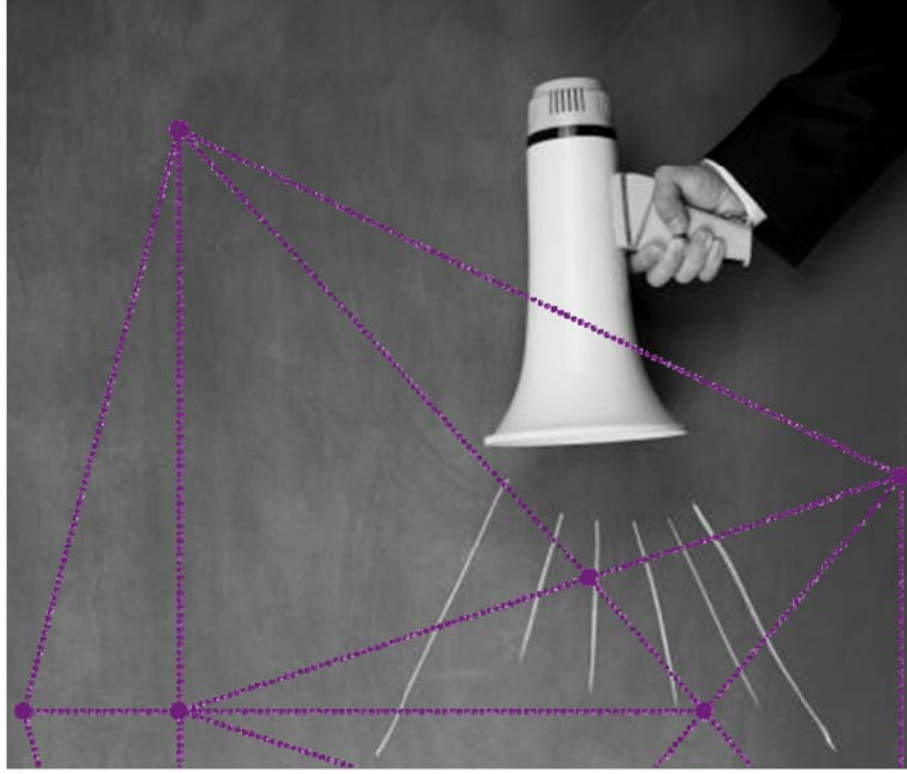
- Passengers comprehend that continuously mentioning specific locations in relation to fatalities could cause these to be perceived as a location to take one's life

The belief that those wishing to die by suicide will find a way to do so runs so deep even some stakeholders – familiar with research around the issue – question whether the announcement wording will make a real impact.

*“If people want to take their own
life they will find a way.
Reduction of suicides on the
railway could just lead to an
increase in suicides using other
methods.”*

Stakeholder

Attempts to educate passengers about the issue could prove futile and counterproductive



- If **the rationale** for changing the announcement (to reduce suicides) were to be communicated to passengers, it would have to be accompanied by **a communications campaign**, as there is low spontaneous awareness of the issue
- However, **communicating the issue of imitative behaviour would prove hard**. Passengers do not react well to complex, theoretical arguments and need facts and figures to accept that a change in announcement terminology could work in reducing imitative behaviour (e.g. “due to changing the announcement terminology, the rate of suicides went down x % in y years”)
- In addition, introducing the idea that the changed terminology has worked to reduce suicides/ has been introduced with that goal in mind could be **counterproductive** as this can lead to the new terminology becoming a code for suicides
- Furthermore, stakeholders have indicated that **educating customers can be a challenge** - in particular it is hard to reach the passengers who lack empathy, as they are less interested in reading communications (e.g. magazines) from the industry
- In addition, passengers feel it is **‘unfair’ to put this choice on to passengers**; again, it creates an intense emotional conflict (do I prioritise my interests over those of vulnerable people?) which is uncomfortable

A black and white photograph of a train station platform. On the left, a large clock is visible. A train is on the tracks to the right. A purple geometric pattern, consisting of a series of connected dots and lines forming a complex, star-like shape, is overlaid on the image. The word "Prevention" is written in white, bold, sans-serif font, rotated 90 degrees counter-clockwise, and positioned within the purple pattern.

Prevention

Truth.

Stakeholder interviews revealed the plethora of suicide prevention methods, however passengers' awareness of these is low

Main prevention methods

(mentioned by stakeholders)

Passenger awareness

Barriers (physical and psychological)

Limited understanding of the role of barriers in preventing suicides; most assume these are for general safety and order purposes

Staff training

Passengers feel that it is important that staff are trained to deal with potentially suicidal passengers, however awareness of this already taking place today is low

Staff surveillance

Passengers feel that it is important that staff keep an eye out for potentially suicidal passengers. Again, awareness of this already taking place today is low

Samaritans posters, presence and collaboration

There is awareness of Samaritans work among those who have come across it (posters, staff at stations) – however this isn't always necessarily directly linked to suicide prevention (some see this as a general helpline for people feeling down)

Trying out/ investigating: Using blue lighting

Very low awareness

Most passengers do not realise what the purpose of barriers at train stations is



Preventing access to fast train tracks

not identified by most as a suicide prevention method; but they make sense when explained. However some feel they make platforms more crowded and are reportedly an “eyesore”



Psychological barriers

are not easily identified as suicide prevention barriers



Barriers at the end of the platform

make sense as a suicide prevention method but most don't realise that is their purpose

Passengers react positively to Samaritans' involvement in helping passengers see past their problems



- Some passengers are familiar with Samaritans' posters previously at stations. Samaritans' volunteers presence at stations has also been noticed by some
- Passengers generally receive Samaritans' posters well; the message communicated was seen to be positive, and appropriate to passengers feeling down (not only those feeling suicidal)
- Passengers tend not to see a link between the posters and suicide prevention on the railway. Particularly less frequent travellers do not associate railways in particular with suicides / consider railways as a common suicide method, so the link between the posters and suicide prevention is not obvious
- Suggestions for Samaritans' involvement going forward include audio help points so that someone at the end of a station can be spoken to immediately, and free help lines at stations
- Samaritans' posters were overall seen to create a more compassionate atmosphere and to help passengers feeling down

Passengers see how they could play a role in creating a more helpful and empathetic environment – including looking out for vulnerable passengers



- Most passengers feel they would 'do something' if they saw someone who looked upset / to be contemplating suicide; for example, they would alert staff, or ask if they were OK
- However, passengers feel that intervening first and foremost is the responsibility of train staff – passengers often 'come and go' and might not spot issues as they spend only a little time at the railway station/on the platform
- There is general support for campaigns promoting empathy and kindness to each other as passengers. Some mentioned tube campaigns (e.g. about eating smelly food, or putting feet on the seat) as examples; passengers felt this could be a good idea to remind them to look out for each other
- **Passengers realise they have a role to play in creating a better, more compassionate atmosphere at stations – and as part of this, helping vulnerable people. Communications campaigns focused on this broader goal could have potential due to their perceived relevance, compared to a more narrow campaign focusing on suicide prevention alone (when many passengers don't associate the railway with suicides)**

Ways Forward

Truth.



Suggested ways forward (1)

Announcement terminology

We have ‘permission’ from passengers to change the standard ‘person hit by a train’ announcement to one that does not explicitly or implicitly imply a fatality, provided the new announcement is perceived as honest and transparent

- **Clear ‘winners’** that meet the needs of passengers as well as the rail industry have emerged from this research, such as referring to ‘emergency services dealing with an incident’ but language is complex and it may not be possible to please everyone 100%
- **Passengers feel it is important for TOCs and the rail industry to remain honest**, but do not see it necessary for the rail industry to provide full details of an incident (e.g. a fatality, a person hit by a train) especially when this can be upsetting
- **The rationale passengers have for preferring less explicit messaging is different to that of the industry**, and we see no value in communicating the rail industry’s rationale (reducing imitative behaviour) to passengers; doing so could lead to the selected announcement becoming code for suicide

Suggested ways forward (2)

Channel strategy

Providing consistent information across channels is key. Making the most of the mix of channels passengers use will help them plan their journeys and understand disruption on the railway

- **Passengers' priority is practical information** in times of disruption and they don't always understand when or how this is available to them – they will then use announcements as 'shortcuts' to develop their own assessment of the delay
- **Staff can play a key role in times of disruption.** Staff members could be given option to explain the exact nature of the incident to those who request it, to avoid any backlash against train companies and staff members. This does run the risk of it becoming 'code' for suicide but only passengers who genuinely want to know what has occurred will find out. Other passengers can choose not to know. As staff play a key communication role, it's important that staff at all levels (platform staff as well as middle management) are trained to respond in the right way
- **Leveraging digital communication forms** and making them more widely available (e.g. social media screens at unmanned stations, encouraging app take-up) can help provide up-to-date information and alternative route suggestions to passengers in times of disruption

Suggested ways forward (3)

Communicating suicide prevention efforts to passengers

Communications focused on empathy and compassion on the railway network will be received more positively by passengers than those focused on suicide prevention alone

- **Passengers struggle to understand the complexity of the issue of imitative behaviour** or to fully accept this as a rationale for changing announcements – therefore we recommend not communicating this rationale directly to passengers
- **Passengers are positively surprised** upon hearing that the rail industry is highly engaged in preventing suicides on the railway. However, efforts to communicate the suicide prevention work done could inadvertently lead to suggesting the railway is an effective method of suicide. Many passengers do not yet associate the railway with suicides, so this type of communication could inadvertently create these associations
- Passengers feel communications campaigns **encouraging more empathy on the railway** would work well, and see their role as being more compassionate towards fellow passengers, including those who seem clearly distressed or to be contemplating a suicide

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