

London Midland rail franchise passenger research

July 2015



Introduction

The following was produced for Passenger Focus before its remit was expanded and rebranded to Transport Focus.

Research background

The current West Midlands franchise (LM), operated by Govia-owned company London Midland, expires on 1 April 2016. It is anticipated that the Department for Transport (DfT), will offer a short-term contract, likely to be around 15 months, to Govia. This is known as a direct award and will see Govia hold the franchise until June 2017, during which time the DfT will run a competitive tender to operate the franchise after this date.

Research objectives

The overall aim of the research, which was funded by DfT, was to understand passengers' current experiences with London Midland and, particularly, their aspirations for the future of the franchise. The specific objectives of the research were:

- Understand passengers' use and experience of the railways under the existing franchise
- Obtain passengers' aspirations for the future, including:
 - The environment at the station
 - The environment on board the train
 - The frequency of the train service and capacity that the train runs at
 - The reliability and punctuality of trains
 - Customer service and staff
 - Value for money
- Explore passengers' awareness of the franchising process and their desire for engagement.

The findings from the research are being shared with DfT and used to help inform their specification for proposals from the operator for the direct award period. Longer-term issues will be considered for the next franchise competition.

Research methodology

During December 2014 qualitative focus groups were convened with London Midland passengers and depth interviews were conducted with some disabled users of the service.

Focus Groups - eight, 90 minute focus groups were conducted across three locations (Birmingham, Crewe and Northampton). These locations were chosen in order to ensure that we sampled as much of the LM network as possible, including both main and suburban train lines into towns and cities. Four groups were conducted in Birmingham to sample both the local lines and longer-distance routes. Each focus group contained between five or six respondents.

Depth Interviews – six, 45 minute depth interviews were conducted in the same locations as above with disabled passengers who use the LM service. These included people with

learning disabilities, mobility problems, visual impairment and hearing impairment, who helped us understand some of their specific experiences and requirements when using the railway.

Across both the focus groups and depth interviews, passengers were using the train for either commuting or business/leisure purposes and we divided respondents into those undertaking typical journeys of more, or less, than 30 minutes.

While the research was qualitative only, and so provides no statistics, this report draws on information from other Transport Focus quantitative research to provide further detail and comparison.

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1. Key findings

1.1 Passengers' reported experience of using the London Midland service

Research participants described the London Midland service as one that is reasonably priced, but offers a 'no-frills' service compared to other train operating companies. For example, passengers claim that the service often takes 'the long way round' and not always the quickest, most direct route.

London Midland staff were considered friendly, helpful and always willing to assist when sought out at stations and on trains. The Twitter account was seen as particularly useful during disruption.

Areas where passengers felt London Midland fell short included overcrowding on the train, which was of the greatest concern to the focus group participants and particularly an issue for commuters. Other notable concerns were frequent disruption and delays, and a lack of communication about disruption at stations.

1.1.1 Comparison of qualitative feedback with National Rail Passenger Survey¹

National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) scores show 82 per cent of passengers rated their overall satisfaction with their LM journey as satisfactory or good. This compares with 80 per cent for London and South East (LSE) sector operators, the comparator service group for LM, and a national average of 81 per cent.

The relatively positive comments about LM being reasonably priced reflect an NRPS score of 54 per cent for value for money of the price of your ticket. This is notably higher than the sector average of 41 per cent and the national score of 46 per cent.

London Midland scores for the attitude and helpfulness of staff at stations and on trains are 68 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively, compared to LSE sector scores of 71 per cent and 54 per cent.

Complaints of overcrowding on the train are reflected in low satisfaction scores for sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand. 67 per cent of all LM passengers are satisfied with this factor. This is higher than the LSE sector score of 62 per cent, but lower than the national average of 72 per cent. However, the LM score for peak passengers is only 31 per cent, whilst the off-peak score is 70 per cent.

Passengers' reported dissatisfaction with the frequency of disruption and delays on London Midland tallies with NRPS results for the operator, with only 74 per cent of their passengers satisfied with the punctuality and reliability of their train journeys. The LSE sector scores 75 per cent, which is also the national average.

The LM score of 36 per cent for how well train company deals with delays compares with the LSE sector score of 35 per cent and the national average of 38 per cent.

¹ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/national-rail-passenger-survey-nrps-autumn-2014-full-report>

1.1.2 Variation in experiences by location and passenger type

Experiences of travelling on LM services were relatively consistent across each of the groups at the locations sampled (Birmingham, Crewe and Northampton), though there were some areas of dissatisfaction that were specific to certain localities and passenger type. These areas are listed below:

Birmingham group

- Infrequent service
- Limited facilities at smaller, rural stations
- Inconvenience at Birmingham New Street Station due to refurbishment works
- Evening services not frequent enough, particularly at rural stations.

Crewe group

- Lack of staff on trains and platforms
- Short notice given for platform alterations
- Long queues at station ticket machines at peak times.

Northampton group

- Staff lack knowledge and fail to communicate delays and disruption
- Inconvenience caused by Northampton station refurbishment works.

Passenger type

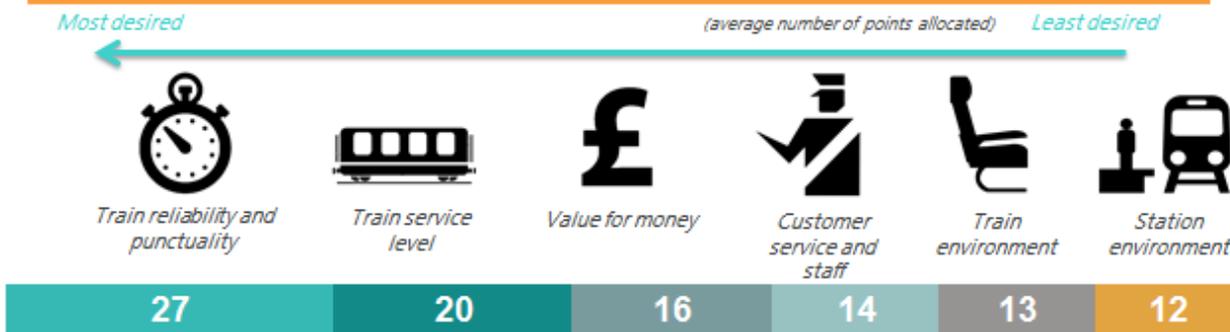
- Overcrowding, disruption and delays are more apparent amongst commuters
- Business/leisure passengers put more emphasis on the lack of staff at stations and on the trains, Wi-Fi/food/drink on trains, and infrequent/disrupted trains at weekends
- Disabled passengers desire more staff at stations and on board trains to provide assistance, more seats and advance notice of platform changes to allow timely transfer to new location.

Passengers in Northampton and Birmingham felt that the amount of disruption and delays, as well as the lack of information about them was influenced by the refurbishment works being undertaken at the station.

1.2 Passenger aspirations for the London Midland service

Passengers were asked to identify the areas where they felt most improvement was needed in the LM service. The results show that of the six areas proposed, improved train reliability and punctuality, followed by an increased train service level (frequency) was most desired.

Passengers were asked to allocate 100 points across six key areas for improvement. They were required to award the highest number of points to the area which they felt needed most improvement



Base: Total 48, Birmingham 22, Crewe 13, Northampton 13

At first sight, the order of importance in this qualitative project is not directly reflective of a quantitative Transport Focus study into Rail passengers' priorities for improvements². This found that, amongst LM passengers, the top priority for improvement was 'price of train tickets offers better value for money'. With an index of 473 this was nearly five times more important than a notional score of 100 for the 'average' factor³.

Passengers always able to get a seat on the train and sufficient frequency of train services ranked second and third priorities for improvement, with index scores of 374 and 242 respectively.

However, the priorities for improvement study included a number of individual factors relating to punctuality and reliability. More trains arriving on time than now ranked fourth at 192. There were also high scores for less frequent major unplanned disruptions (sixth at 175), fewer trains cancelled (seventh at 151) and less disruption due to engineering works (thirteenth at 100). Taken together these emphasise the importance of reliability and punctuality, as identified by the focus group participants.

1.2.1 Why improvement is desired

There are several reasons why improved train reliability and punctuality is desired so strongly by passengers:

- Passengers on all parts of the network experience frequent delays and cancellations, especially commuters who experience frequent, short delays of around 5-10 minutes
- Passengers have been left waiting as delayed trains 'skip' intermediate stations in order to make-up time
- The communication of disruption at the station is considered poor and often last minute, whilst staff are not always knowledgeable about the situation.

In terms of the train service level, improvement is desired as a result of:

² <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/rail-passengers-priorities-for-improvements-october-2014>

³ See appendix 2.1 for a full comparison of London Midland passenger priorities and Great Britain passenger priorities

- Overcrowding on many lines during peak hours, with the situation only getting worse
- Difficulty moving through the train in peak hours due to the number of standing passengers
- Too few services later at night and at the weekends
- Lack of services during large scale events e.g. Football matches.

1.2.2 Identifying improvements

Passengers perceived many of the improvements they suggested to be achievable in the short term i.e. the next two years. Therefore they expected to see improvements made to the London Midland service implemented as soon as possible.

Although passengers desired a reduction in disruption and delays most, they found it difficult to suggest or find solutions that might bring this about. Improvements that they were able to suggest centred mainly on the train and station environment as well as to ticketing; including cost, choice and provision.

Area	Suggested improvements
Value for money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplified ticket choices with increased transparency on the best value for money options • Tickets that are valid across different TOCs, in case of sudden cancellation • Price increases reflective of an improved service • Fares reflective of distance travelled, with no disproportionate increases past a certain point • Better communication of offers e.g. family travel card • A loyalty scheme where points are earned for travel • Delay repayment made straightforward and easy to claim, and compensation for shorter delays • ‘Oyster-type’ smartcards which always deduct the optimal fare • Consistent ‘rules’ about travelling on the network without a ticket.
Train reliability and punctuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faster trains (to make up lost time), or more frequent trains at peak times ensuring another train arrives soon • Increased flexibility so tickets can be used on other TOCs, services and modes of transport • Replacement services e.g. bus • Immediate repayment/compensation • Improved communication of disruption: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Communication of delays and cancellations in advance of arrival at the station e.g. through push notifications/text messages ○ More staff at stations and on trains to advise passengers of alternative options

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Information at stations in line and up to date with information on Twitter
Station environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● More, working ticket machines at the station ● Clearer communication about dates for station improvement works and reasons for renovations ● Improved waiting areas (warmer, with more comfortable seating) ● Cleaner toilets ● Easier platform access for disabled passengers (e.g. more lifts) ● More, free car parking spaces ● Better, more varied choice of food outlets at stations (independent shops)
Train environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cleaner carriages and toilets (where available) on board the train ● Better regulated temperature, adapted to outside and what people are likely to be wearing ● Free, working Wi-Fi on board the train ● Plug sockets available at seats ● Information screens on-board to display disruption messages along with next stops
Train service level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● More trains desired at peak times for some stations ● More trains to run on a Sunday, particularly at rural stations ● Trains to run later into the night ● More night services to avoid being left stranded in the case of cancellations ● Clearer timetabling, with better coordinated connections with other TOCs' trains ● More carriages on trains at peak times to avoid overcrowding
Customer service and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● More staff at the station, particularly for assistance and security ● More staff on board the train for cleaning and assistance

1.2.3 Prioritising improvements

Passengers' were asked to prioritise the improvements that they would most like to see, from the list above. The improvements they prioritised can be categorised into four key areas. These areas are ultimately centred on improving the situation if disruption does occur.

Problem avoidance – reducing the frequency that problems occur

- Clearer communication of ticket options and fares to avoid the wrong ticket being purchased
- More carriages on existing trains at peak hours to reduce overcrowding
- Better scheduling of trains to avoid delays

Information about problems – providing information to improve situation

- Better communication about delays and cancellations at stations and prior to arrival (e.g. Twitter, email, text...)
- More and better informed staff on trains and platforms to assist in the event of cancellations or delays

Problem resolution – resolving problems if they do occur

- Making the delay repayment scheme easier to use and more visible
- Allowing tickets to be interchangeable with other TOCs (e.g. Virgin Trains) if disruption occurs

Distraction – making disruption more bearable

- Cleaner carriages and toilets on board the train
- Wi-Fi and plug sockets on board trains

1.3 Awareness of Franchise Process

Most passengers knew very little about the rail franchise system, and did not have any particular opinions about it. A few mentioned that they knew the government was involved to some extent, but could not elaborate on this

When probed, the majority had no knowledge about any of the following aspects:

- Criteria for evaluating bids, and who sets this criteria
- Who decides which bidder is awarded the contract, or anything about the stages in the process
- How long the contracts are, and that they can be ended early if deemed necessary
- That passengers have some input into the process.

1.4 Level of relationship felt towards LM

Most customers didn't feel a sense of 'relationship' with their operator, despite the amount of time (commuters in particular) spent using the service. Passengers felt that there was a correlation between the amount of interaction that they had with staff and the extent to which they felt a relationship. For example, those passengers who had positive interactions with staff felt more of a connection with London Midland.

This is no surprise given that in the Passengers' relationship with the rail industry research⁴, London Midland do not fare well in terms of the level of trust that their passengers place in them, nor in the extent to which passengers feel they have a strong relationship with London Midland. Of 23 TOCs, LM place 21st in terms of trust and 11th in terms of relationship.

A reason for the higher placing in relationship versus trust may have something to do with customers feeling that London Midland is synonymous with the region and they do describe LM as providing a 'local service'. Passengers felt that trust and relationship could be improved if London Midland did more to show that they valued their customers and rewarded loyalty, for example through loyalty schemes, special offers and discounts.

⁴ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/news/articles/what-relationship-do-passengers-have-with-train-companies-> Passengers' Relationship with the rail industry, Passenger Focus, August 2014

1. Summary

Overall, passengers perceive travel with London Midland to be cheaper relative to other operators, such as Chiltern and Virgin. However, they feel that the service they receive is lacking in several aspects. This is largely because they feel that disruption including delays and last-minute cancellations are too frequent. In addition the levels of overcrowding, particularly during peak hours, does not make for an enjoyable journey experience.

Given the above, it is unsurprising that the most desired improvements are more reliable and punctual trains, as well as an increased train service level. Passengers believe that the situation can and should be improved in the short term, and expect to see changes in the next two years, especially as fares continue to rise.

Introducing a loyalty scheme, discounts and special offers would increase the extent to which passengers feel a relationship with LM and the extent to which they feel valued as customers. In addition, passengers feel that the presence and interaction with staff is vital to creating a stronger relationship between customer and operator.

2. Appendix

3.1 NRPS Autumn 2014: % satisfied, London Midland versus London and South East sector

Factor	TOC	Sector	TOC index
Overall satisfaction with your journey	82	80	103%
STATION FACILITIES			
Overall satisfaction with the station	74	78	95%
Ticket buying facilities	74	72	102%
Provision of information about train times/platforms	80	80	101%
The upkeep/repair of the station buildings/platforms	66	70	94%
Cleanliness	71	74	96%
The facilities and services	49	55	89%
The attitudes and helpfulness of the staff	68	71	96%
Connections with other forms of public transport	69	76	91%
Facilities for car parking	54	47	115%
Overall environment	63	68	93%
Your personal security whilst using the station	67	69	96%
The availability of staff	53	60	89%
The provision of shelter facilities	68	67	102%
Availability of seating	49	43	114%
How request to station staff was handled	80	83	96%
The choice of shops/eating/drinking facilities available	44	48	90%
TRAIN FACILITIES			
Overall satisfaction with the train	81	77	105%
The frequency of the trains on that route	79	75	106%
Punctuality/reliability	74	75	99%
The length of time the journey was scheduled to take	86	81	107%
Connections with other train services	76	75	102%
The value for money of the price of your ticket	54	41	130%
Cleanliness of the train	69	73	95%
Upkeep and repair of the train	69	72	96%
The provision of information during the journey	67	67	100%
The helpfulness and attitude of staff on train	60	54	111%
The space for luggage	49	48	101%
The toilet facilities	42	32	130%
Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	67	62	109%
The comfort of the seating area	70	68	102%
The ease of being able to get on and off	81	77	106%
Your personal security on board	77	75	102%
The cleanliness of the inside	71	73	97%

The cleanliness of the outside	76	72	105%
The availability of staff	39	34	113%
How well train company deals with delays	36	35	104%

3.2 Rail passengers' priorities for improvements, London Midland comparison with Great Britain

Factor	London Midland		Great Britain	
	Rank	Index	Rank	Index
Price of train tickets offers better value for money	1	473	1	494
Passengers always able to get a seat on the train	2	374	2	367
Trains sufficiently frequent at the times I wish to travel	3	242	3	264
More trains arrive on time than happens now	4	192	4	178
Less frequent major unplanned disruptions to your journey	5	175	6	161
Train company keeps passengers informed about delays	6	166	5	163
Fewer trains cancelled than happens now	7	151	7	136
Accurate and timely information available at stations	8	131	8	132
Less disruption due to engineering works	9	100	13	90
Inside of train is maintained and cleaned to a high standard	10	97	11	93
Accurate and timely information provided on trains	11	90	12	92
Free Wi-Fi available on the train	12	86	10	97
Well-maintained, clean toilet facilities on every train	13	85	14	89
Journey time is reduced	14	76	9	105
Connections with other train services are always good	15	73	15	84
Seating area on train is very comfortable	16	56	17	59
Good connections with other public transport at stations	17	54	16	62
There is always space in the station car park	18	51	26	27
Improved personal security on the train	19	50	21	41
Train staff have a positive, helpful attitude	20	49	18	47
Station staff have a positive, helpful attitude	21	49	19	46
Improved personal security at the station	22	46	22	38
New ticket formats available such as smartcards, ticket Apps, print at home etc.	23	41	20	45
Stations maintained and cleaned to a high standard	24	37	24	36
More staff available at stations to help passengers	25	32	25	29
Sufficient space on train for passengers' luggage	26	30	23	37
More staff available on trains to help passengers	27	22	28	20
Reduced queuing time when buying a ticket	28	22	29	20

Free Wi-Fi available at the station	29	20	27	24
Access from station entrance to boarding train is step-free	30	18	30	15
Safe and secure bicycle parking available at the station	31	9	31	10



London Midland Rail Franchise Passenger Research

Research Debrief

Prepared for: Passenger Focus

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Prepared in compliance with the International quality standard covering market research, ISO 20252 (2012), The MRS Code of Conduct, and the Data Protection Act 1998 by Illuminas, 183-203 Eversholt Street, London NW1 1BU, UK

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Background, Objectives and Methodology



Background

- The current London Midland (LM) franchise, operated by Govia, expires on 1 April 2016. It is anticipated that the Department for Transport (DfT), will offer a short-term contract, likely to be around 15 months, to Govia. This is known as a direct award and will see Govia hold the franchise until June 2017, during which time DfT will run a competitive tender to operate the franchise beyond that date
- Passenger Focus - as the independent voice of the rail passenger - has a significant role in the franchising process, both in terms of providing evidence of passenger experience and setting out passengers' aspirations for new franchises
- Given the above, DfT asked Passenger Focus to commission research to understand passengers' experiences with the incumbent operator and to identify their aspirations for the direct award period and beyond.





Objectives

- The overall aim of the research is to understand passengers' current experiences with London Midland and, particularly, their aspirations for the future of the franchise.
- The findings from the research are being shared with DfT and used to help inform their specification for proposals from the operator for the direct award period. Longer-term issues will be considered for the next franchise competition.
- The specific objectives of the research were as follows:
 - Understand passengers' use and experience of the railway under the existing franchise
 - Obtain passengers' aspirations for the future, including:
 - The environment at the station, for example, cleanliness, information, ticket purchasing facilities, shops, restaurants and toilets
 - The environment on board the train, for example, cleanliness, toilets, seating, air-conditioning/heating, food/drink
 - The frequency of the train service and capacity that the train runs at
 - The reliability and punctuality of trains such as the level of disruption and delays
 - Customer service and staff, including the attitudes of staff, staffing levels at station and on board trains
 - Value for money, for example, the choice of tickets and cost to travel
 - Understand any specific issues affecting disabled travellers.
 - Explore passengers' awareness of the franchising process and their desire for engagement

Methodology and profile of participants



- Qualitative focus groups were conducted amongst London Midland passengers and depth interviews with some disabled users of the service

Focus groups

- 8 x 90 minute focus groups
 - 4 x Birmingham
 - 2 x Crewe
 - 2 x Northampton
- Amongst commuters and business/leisure passengers
- Amongst older and younger passengers from different socio-economic groups
- Groups contained between 5 and 6 respondents
- Passengers used a mix of main and suburban lines into the town and city centres, making both shorter and longer journeys

Depth interviews

- 6 x 45 minute depth interviews
 - 2 x Birmingham
 - 2 x Crewe
 - 2 x Northampton
- Amongst commuters and business/leisure passengers
- Disabled passengers included those with learning disabilities, mobility problems, visually impaired and hearing impairment.

Research Schedule



- The complete, detailed schedule of focus groups:

LOCATION	GROUP NO	DEMOGRAPHICS	TRAIN USAGE
Birmingham	1	Younger, C1C2D	Commuter
	2	Older, ABC1	Business/Leisure
Birmingham	3	Older, C1C2D	Commuter
	4	Younger, ABC1	Business/Leisure
Crewe	5	Younger, C1C2D	Commuter
	6	Older, ABC1	Business/Leisure
Northampton	7	Older, C1C2D	Commuter
	8	Younger, ABC1	Business/Leisure

Experiences of using the London Midland service





London Midland is the local, low-cost train operator

- Overall, London Midland was seen by many as their local, low-cost train service valid for commuters, business passengers and more occasional leisure journeys
 - Affordable price was the stand-out feature of the London Midland service, with many rating it's value for money quite highly, particularly when compared to alternatives (e.g. Virgin, Chiltern)
- For some, London Midland was the go-to service for smaller rural stations that other TOC's do not stop at
 - For this reason, many considered London Midland as a service they were closer to and more familiar with
 - London Midland was also seen as the ideal service for short journeys
- London Midland staff were considered friendly, helpful and always willing to assist when sought out at stations and on trains
 - London Midland's Twitter account was seen as particularly useful and helpful during disruption
- Having said that, passengers are able to suggest improvements to the service across the entire journey.

*"My line is Redditch to New Street, so I literally just walk down the road and I can just hop on the train and it's fifteen twenty minutes. I don't have to drive and it's just easier."
Birmingham group, Commuter, Younger*

*"They're very good at responding to you on Twitter. And generally you get the information that you need, sometimes they are more up to date than the actual screens."
Birmingham group, Commuter, Younger*

*"I tend to use them for the cost or if you're getting off at a local station because they tend to stop everywhere."
Northampton group, Leisure, Older*

*"Whenever I consult a member of staff for assistance, they are always happy to help. I find them courteous and helpful; it might not be easy to find someone, but when you do they are helpful and positive."
Northampton group, Leisure, Older*

Frustrations with London Midland largely in line with other TOC experiences



- Overcrowding, disruption and delays are amongst the issues that are most commonly mentioned
 - These frustrations are more apparent amongst commuters
- Business/leisure passengers put more emphasis on the lack of staff at stations and on the trains, Wi-Fi/food/drink on trains, and infrequent/disrupted trains at weekends
- Services are perceived to take 'the long way round' and not the quickest, most direct route

"You get what you pay for; it's cheap as chips to go to London if you're willing to stand during half the journey and stop at every station on the way."

Crewe group, Business/Leisure, Older

- Some variation by region
 - Northampton and Birmingham passengers particularly frustrated by the inconveniences caused by the refurbishment works in stations
 - Birmingham passengers felt that they received a service that was reflective of the cost of travel
 - Northampton commuters experienced delays on a regular basis.
 - Passengers in Crewe unhappy with the level of information communicated to them in times of disruption



Experiences relatively consistent across lines



ISSUES EXPERIENCED BY THE MAJORITY

- Overcrowding
- Disruption and delays
- Ticket options and pricing unclear (particularly online)
- Lack of communication of disruptions at stations

Crewe

- Insufficient frequency of services at peak times
- Overcrowding on trains at peak times
- Lack of staff on trains and platforms
- Poor communication of delays and disruption
- Short notice given for platform alterations
- Long queues at station ticket machines at peak times

Northampton

- Frequent delays, particularly at peak times
- Staff lack knowledge and fail to communicate delays and disruption
- Inconvenience caused by Northampton station refurbishment works

Birmingham

- Overcrowding on trains at peak times
- Infrequent service
- Delays and cancellations occur frequently (particularly Redditch and Worcester)
- Insufficient communication of delays and cancellations
- Limited facilities at smaller, rural stations
- Inconvenience at Birmingham New Street Station due to refurbishment works
- Evening services not frequent enough, particularly at rural stations.



Overcrowding, not feeling valued, choice of shops/ food outlets at stations and disruption cause most dissatisfaction

Passengers were asked to rank on a scale of 1-10 the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each of the following statements (1=completely disagree, 10=completely agree). They were asked to think about their experience when travelling with London Midland specifically.



Base: Total 48, Birmingham 22, Crewe 13, Northampton 13

These figures should be used only as indicative, due to the low base sizes

Passenger desires for improvement on the London Midland service

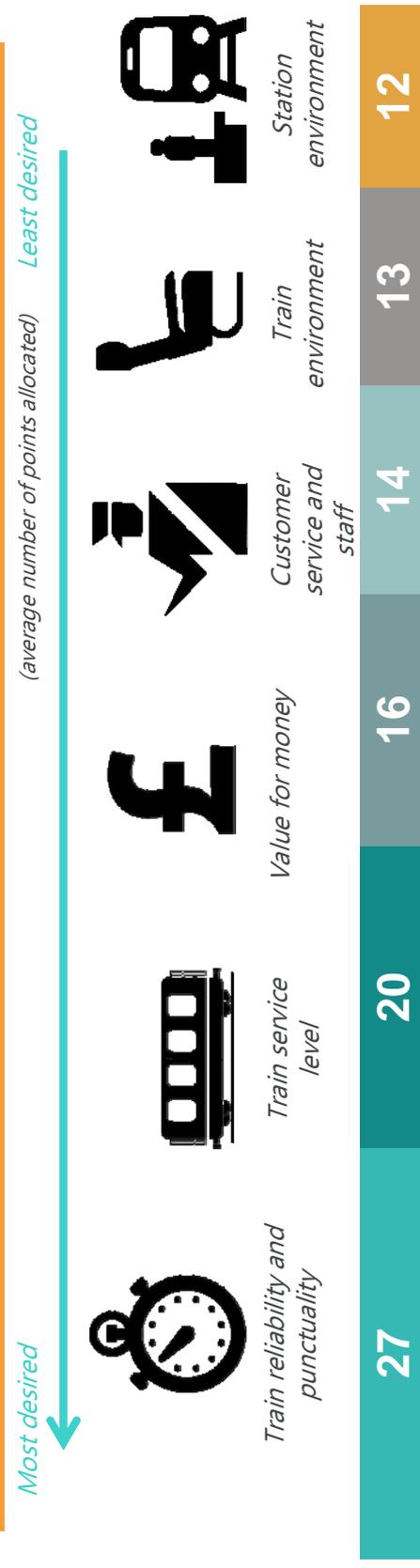




Improvements desired across the whole customer journey

- Passengers attributed most importance to improvements to train reliability and punctuality, along with train service levels

Passengers were asked to allocate 100 points across six key areas for improvement. They were required to award the highest number of points to the area which they felt needed most improvement



Base: Total 48, Birmingham 22, Crewe 13, Northampton 13
 These figures should be used only as an indication, due to the low base sizes

- Birmingham** passengers place particular importance on train reliability and punctuality (average score of 30), especially compared to Crewe (average score 17)
- Crewe** passengers place more importance on the train service level than other regions (average score of 23).

"I can confidently say that not a week goes by where my train to Birmingham is not delayed by at least 5 minutes at least once a week!"
 Northampton group, Commuter, Older

"Crewe is a big station... it's hard to believe that at 9 o'clock on a Monday if you miss your train you have to wait so long for the next one!"
 Crewe group, Commuter, Younger



Why improvement is desired?



Train reliability and punctuality

Frequent disruptions, delays and cancellations

- Passengers on all parts of the network experience frequent delays and cancellations
- Commuters in particular experience frequent, short delays (5-10 min)
- Delayed trains 'skip' intermediate stations to make up time
 - Particularly frustrating in off-peak times when trains are already infrequent
- Frustration that weather conditions can influence disruption
 - Little understanding of issues such as 'leaves on the line' , with majority perceiving it as an 'excuse'
- Staff shortages perceived to be the cause of many delays e.g. 'driver hasn't turned up'

*"Their statistics are fake because all they do is cut all the stations out and it's not a late train."
Birmingham group, Commuter, Younger*

*"They will just say 'this train will not be stopping at local stations'. I get so angry about it, it's clearly dented me psychologically."
Birmingham group, Leisure, Older*

*"We got kicked off the train in the middle of nowhere and no one was able to even tell us where to wait for the rail replacement buses!"
Northampton group, Commuter, Older*

*"One train had to be cancelled because they didn't have an available member of staff, and I think that's the worst excuse ever."
Birmingham group, Commuter, Younger*

*"No one actually at the station can seem to tell you what's going on, but the guy on Twitter, whoever it is, give him credit."
Birmingham group, Commuter, Younger*

Communication of disruption

- Lack of communication at stations
- Delays communicated at the last minute
- Staff not knowledgeable about the situation or potential impact
- Passengers not sufficiently informed of alternatives services or options
- LM Twitter liked by those who use it and often provides better information than at the station

Why improvement is desired?



Overcrowding

- Overcrowding on many lines during peak hours
- A perception that the situation is getting worse with nothing being done about it
 - Some tailor their journey or choice of station in order to improve their chances of getting a seat
- An appreciation that extra carriages are put on some trains in peak hours, but not always consistent
- Difficult to move through the train in peak hours due to number of standing passengers
- Bicycles block entrance/exits and take up valuable standing space
 - Inconsistency in services that do/don't allow bikes and location of bike 'spaces' on train



Train service level

Frequency of service

- Those using larger, urban stations are satisfied with the frequency of service
- Those at smaller, more rural stations with a less frequent service, say service is sufficient providing trains are reliable
- Timetable is sometimes perceived to be complicated and passengers can't always see the logic in frequency of trains
- Too few services later at night and at the weekends
 - Particularly for those working shifts (e.g. Sunday mornings)
- Some feel LM don't anticipate large scale events e.g. Birmingham Park Run, and don't alter service accordingly.

"It's a bit of a kick in the teeth where every year they write to me and they put my train pass up, and I haven't seen any improvement."

Birmingham group, Commuter, Younger

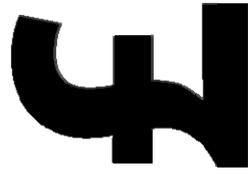
"If you're out at Hereford you can wait a long time, between about 12 pm and 2 pm there's virtually nothing."

Birmingham group, Leisure, Older

"I'm lucky there is always someone kind enough to offer me a seat, but I feel sorry for those poor mums with their kids complaining because they want to sit down, who have to stand during the entire journey."

Disabled passenger, Northampton

Why improvement is desired?



Value for money

A cheaper but no frills service

- Recognition that travel on London Midland is cheaper than other operators
- Though in return, the service is not perceived to be 'as good as' Chiltern or Virgin services
- Where passengers have choice, London Midland is often only used if the other providers are too expensive
 - But some are willing to pay a bit more to enjoy the 'better service' provided by Virgin or Chiltern
- Irregular workers (e.g. 2-3 day travellers, shift workers) feel as if they get a poor deal because 7-day season tickets do not make financial sense, but single/return tickets are proportionally expensive
- Commuters complain of ever-increasing travel costs with little improvement in service

Complexity of pricing

- Variability in prices between certain zones, stations or lines is not always understood or perceived as fair
 - Cost of travel more expensive in rural areas, further from the town/city centres
 - Zone 'cards' offer good value for money compared to 'point to point' travel
- Fare structures, offers and ticket types are poorly understood and not well communicated
 - Many are interested in group travel cards, but are unaware of their existence
- Leisure passengers find it difficult to find the best fare for a journey, and rely on staff for guidance where possible, but still feel anxious about the tickets they have bought.

"I prefer paying a bit more and getting Chiltern because it stops at Moor Street station and I prefer that station, it's less crowded and has nicer places for coffee..."

Birmingham, Commuter, Older

"London Midland is the low cost operator, fairly basic, not that many facilities..."

Northampton, Leisure, Younger

"There is a bit of a contrast between London Midland and Virgin, from Birmingham to London, Virgin will stop once and London Midland stops everywhere."

Northampton, Leisure, Younger



Why improvement is desired?



Customer service and staff

- Staff are considered helpful and friendly whenever consulted for information or help
- However, several issues have been raised:
 - Disruptions are frequently attributed to staff shortages
 - Staff can be hard to find at stations
 - Smaller stations are increasingly unstaffed
 - Inconsistency in 'rules' of purchasing tickets on the trains and staff not always available on train to purchase tickets from
 - Ticket staff at destination 'fine' passengers who had no ability to purchase ticket anywhere along journey
 - Lack up to date knowledge and unable to provide information about disruption
 - Staff on trains perceived as more friendly and helpful than staff on platforms
- For disabled passengers it can be difficult to contact LM in advance of their journey to arrange help upon arrival at the station, because they are unable to find a contact number

"It's the whole staff shortage thing, they need to look at employing more staff. I wrote them about that, and they came back saying we train so many staff, it takes a year to train a train driver, and then we often lose some to Virgin. So there's got to be a reason why they're losing staff, they need to look at their recruitment process."

Birmingham, Commuter, Older

"You know in the winter that it's more common people are ill, so as a company you are more prepared. And yet every year, time and time again, there's a staff shortage due to sickness, there's a staff shortage, well you should have back up."

Birmingham, Commuter, Younger

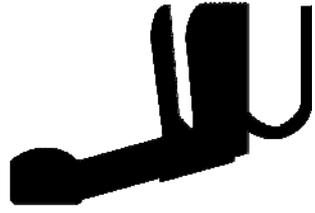
"I've been given a fine, and I wouldn't dream of not paying you know, straight up, I said look I'm going to pay it now, and it was 'no'. It's kind of harsh really."

Birmingham, Commuter, Younger

"I'm not sure how good their morale is, they always give the impression they are not particularly happy. Might be because people like me moan at them all the time. I think addressing staff morale and encouraging them to contribute a better atmosphere, which would make the service better in itself."

Birmingham, Commuter, Older

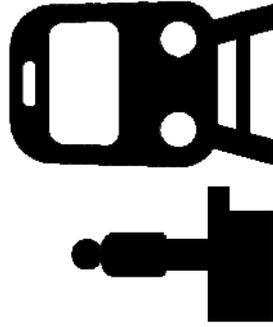
Why improvement is desired?



Train environment

- Facilities on board the train are perceived to be basic and outdated
- However, this is not a priority for many because of the relatively short journeys they make
- Environment not comfortable enough for longer journeys (i.e. to London)
- During peak times, the layout and positioning of seats makes it difficult to stand anywhere but by the entrance/exits
 - This makes boarding/disembarking difficult
 - Standing space lacks hand rails
- Lack of bins/staff facilitating rubbish clear-up during the journey
- Toilets are dirty
- Lack of plugs cause issues on longer journeys e.g. charging phones.

*"I've been on journeys where not a single toilet all up and down was train was working."
Crewe group, Leisure, Older*



Station environment

- Lack of parking spaces
 - A perception that parking is often used by non-train users
- After dark stations are unstaffed and poorly lit
- Ticket machines are often not working or too complicated
- A perception that fare 'dodgers' are prevalent due to lack of staff and open barriers at destination stations
- Lack of shelter at smaller stations (waiting rooms are closed when staff leave)
- Lack of toilets or vending points, even for a 'cup of tea'
- Larger stations can be difficult to navigate, particularly during refurbishment.

*"Don't get me started on the state of Northampton station; the worst bit is that it was supposed to be finished last month and we are still waiting for an update."
Northampton group, Commuter, Older*

Aspirations for the London Midland service



Little distinction between short and long term aspirations – passengers want improvements in the short term



- Passengers expect to see improvements made to the London Midland service implemented as soon as possible
- They believe that much of what they suggested in terms of improvement is achievable in the short term i.e. next two years

"If my train terminates suddenly or is cancelled before it leaves the station, it would be great to have someone knowledgeable there to tell me what to do next."
Northampton group, Business/Leisure, Younger

"Surely it can't be too difficult to install Wi-Fi on London Midland trains, all other operators have it!"
Crewe, Commuter, Younger



- Passengers struggled to suggest solutions to some of the more technical issues, such as reducing delays and disruption
- However, they could freely suggest improvements to ticketing and the station/train environment
- Some of the most suggested improvements included:
 - Installing Wi-Fi on trains
 - Improving the ticket options on the London Midland website; making deals, offers and cheapest tickets more visible
 - More staff available on trains and stations to communicate disruptions and alternative routes.

Aspirations: Value for money



Choice

- Simplified ticket choices, making clear the best value for money option
- More visible group travel tickets and options
- Tickets valid on other TOC services, in case of sudden cancellation

Pricing

- Any price increases reflective of an improved service
- Better deals on standard day return tickets to London i.e. tickets purchased on the day
- Fares reflective of distance travelled, with no disproportionate increases past a certain point
- Better communication of offers e.g. family travel card
- Zero booking fees when purchasing tickets in advance

Loyalty

- A loyalty scheme where points are earned for travel
- Railcards valid in peak hours
- Delay repayment to be publicised and more straightforward to claim
- Compensation for shorter delays (commuters)
- Recognition from TOC about poor service

Provision

- 'Oyster-type' smartcards which always deduct the optimal fare
- Consistent 'rules' about travelling on the network without a ticket.

"I like to know what the best price is rather than having to shop around."

Birmingham, Business/Leisure, Older



Aspirations: Train reliability and punctuality

Dealing with disruption

- Overall passengers would like to experience less delays
 - Particularly for commuters who experience more delays due to their more frequent use of the service
- Faster trains (to make up lost time), or more frequent trains at peak times ensuring another train arrives soon
- For more significant delays, passengers can identify ways to reduce the impact:
 - Increased flexibility so tickets can be used on other TOCs, services and modes of transport
 - Replacement services e.g. bus
 - Immediate repayment/compensation
 - Offering hotel stays in extreme circumstances e.g. if last service is cancelled

Communication during disruption

- Communication of delays and cancellations in advance of arrival at the station e.g. through push notifications/text messages
- Communication about any upcoming or expected delays/disruption
- More staff at stations and on trains to advise passengers of alternative options
- Increased publicity about delay repayment scheme and making it more straightforward to claim
- Information at stations in-line and up-to-date with information on Twitter.

"At peak times a person is more helpful for information than the tannoy. They have access to information from their system, a person tends to fess up."
Birmingham group, Commuter, Older

"I think the London Midland Twitter page is great for keeping you updated, just wish it was running at 6am."
Crewe group, Commuter, Younger

Aspirations: Station environment



Larger stations



- More (working) ticket machines
- Clearer communication about dates for station improvement works and reasons for renovations
- Free Wi-Fi at stations
- Improved waiting areas (warmer, more comfortable seating)
- Cleaner toilets
- Easier platform access for disabled passengers (e.g. more lifts)
- More, free car parking spaces
- Better, more varied choice of food outlets at stations (independent shops)

- More car parking spaces and only for train users
- Free, accessible toilets i.e. on each platform
- More (working) ticket machines
- Shelter on the platform to protect from elements and accessible when the station is unstaffed
- Seating on the platform
- Better lighting/brighter for safety and security
- Staff/security on station at night
- Vending machines, including hot drinks.

"As a woman, I'm scared to get the train home at night because my local station looks abandoned and is very dark."

Crewe group, Business/Leisure, Older

Smaller stations



Aspirations: Environment on board the train



Cleaner

- More bins on board to dispose of rubbish
- More frequent cleaning regime (not just at destination stations)
- Cleaner, working toilets on board
- Better regulated temperature, adapted to outside and what people are likely to be wearing

"I'm frightened that one day I'm going to fall in the gap between the train and platform; that step is so steep!"

Disabled passenger, Crewe

"If you travel on a Virgin Train down to London, there's somebody coming up and down the train, twice in that hour collecting rubbish. The rubbish is just left on London Midland."

Birmingham group, Commuter, Younger

Technological

- Plug sockets available at seats
- Information screens on-board to display disruption messages along with next stops
- Ability for disabled passengers to notify driver they need more time to get off train
- Wi-Fi available on all services



Layout

- Automatic ramps for disabled passengers to board easily
- More spacious layout (e.g. two seats on each side) to allow people to walk through aisles
- Better designed standing space, something to hold on to
- Luggage storage for large suitcases in each carriage
- Updated interior – more comfortable seats for longer journeys.

"For journeys as long as Crewe-London, where you're likely to want to stay for over a day, you need luggage storage big enough to carry something larger than a rucksack."

Crewe group, Business/Leisure, Older



Aspirations: Train service level

- More trains desired at peak times for some stations
- More trains to run on a Sunday, particularly at rural stations
- Trains to run later into the night
- More night services to avoid being left stranded in the case of cancellations
- Clearer timetabling which coordinates better with other TOCs' connecting trains



"I was once returning from London on the last train when it suddenly terminated at Milton Keynes without prior warning and I had to get a taxi all the way home!"

Northampton, Business/Leisure, Younger



Overcrowding

- More carriages on trains at peak times to avoid overcrowding
- More assistance for disabled passengers trying to get a seat on-board when none are available.

"I'm lucky as Northampton is the first stop on the way to Birmingham, but I feel sorry for people that get on 3 or 4 stops later and can't find a seat."

Northampton, Commuter, Older

"Why is it like half seven, 'that's not a commuter train so we will only put two carriages on'. It is a commuter train, because people are starting earlier and earlier and commuting times are lasting until ten o'clock really."

Birmingham, Commuter, Younger



Aspirations: Customer service and staff

- Commuters felt that staff resources should be focused on keeping the service running to time and minimising delays and disruption
- Business/leisure passengers said that they would like to see more staff on board and on stations, specifically to:
 - Help passengers find the best priced tickets at station machines
 - Ensure safety at night, particularly on smaller stations or with intoxicated passengers on board
 - Inform of disruptions and alternative transport options in unfamiliar stations
 - Sell tickets on board, where permitted, so passengers are not fined at destination
 - Clean train carriages and toilets on a more regular basis
 - Check tickets to make sure people are not fare dodging.

"Sometimes I just won't travel at certain times when I know the station will either be too full or too empty, because it's either impossible to get on the train or there's no one around to help me get on the train."

Disabled passenger, Northampton

"At some of the small stations at night time there doesn't seem to be any staff there at all and if you get dumped at a station, it doesn't feel very safe, being there on your own."

Birmingham, Commuter, Older

"If they had more staff I'd want it more on the reliability, doing the maintenance on the trains and the drivers, and the conductors and the platforms."

Birmingham, Commuter, Younger





Aspirations: Disabled passengers

- Disabled passengers' needs were largely in line with those of non-disabled passengers, with a few exceptions:

At the station

- Advanced notice about platform changes desired as some passengers with mobility issues felt announcements are often last minute and do not allow enough time to walk to the new platform
- Some rural stations near Crewe do not have step-free access to cross over to other platforms
 - This also affects parents with buggies/pushchairs
- Desire for disabled parking close to station. One specific mention, in Northampton, of the disabled parking being located far away from the station and on the top level of the car park
- More seats desired on the platform for comfort

On board the train

- More staff desired on board train and at stations to offer assistance
 - Particularly for help in boarding the train for those with mobility issues
- Passengers think boarding the train could be improved by installing ramps instead of steps
- Disabled passengers would like to be able to make contact with train staff if necessary – potentially through a call button on the train/on the platform
- More seats desired on the train dedicated to disabled passengers
- Desire for the introduction of a method that alerts fellow passengers about impairment, e.g. 'baby on board' pins which are supplied by London Underground
 - This would help disabled passengers get a seat without having to publicly explain their condition to fellow passengers.

"I don't want to have to argue with people about my condition just because it isn't obvious; I faint if I stand for too long and that's why I need to sit down, many people don't believe me."
Disabled passenger, Birmingham



Quotes from disabled passengers

"I was on the platform last week and an announcement came on saying that the platform had changed; but by the time I made it to the new platform I'd missed my train! I was so upset."

Disabled passenger, Crewe

"Some of the platforms don't have seats, and I always try to get to the station early anyway because it takes me longer to get to places, but then when I get there I really need to sit down because I can't be on my feet for too long but there is no-where!"

Disabled passenger, Crewe

"The Twitter guy is friendly. When I think of London Midland I think of the guy on the Twitter feed, because he's personable, you can always have a joke with him. If the drivers and the conductors, if they were a bit more personable."

Disabled passenger, Birmingham

"It doesn't make sense to have a disabled parking spot on the second floor of the car-park if you then have to walk down a flight of stairs to access the station! I know there's a ramp, but it's on the other side and you'd have to walk all the way around the car park to then get into the station."

Disabled passenger, Northampton

Awareness of Franchise Process



What do passengers know about rail franchising?

- Most passengers knew very little about the rail franchise system, and did not have any particular opinions about it
- Some think that some TOCs are given preferential treatment over others e.g. prioritised entry into a platform
 - A few mentioned that they knew the government was involved to some extent, but could not elaborate on this
- When probed, the majority had no knowledge about any of the following aspects:
 - Criteria for evaluating bids, and who sets this criteria
 - Who decides which bidder is awarded the contract, or anything about the stages in the process
 - How long the contracts are, and that they can be ended early if deemed necessary
 - That passengers have some input into the process.

"I'm sure different companies pay different money to different lines or have priorities, because I've sat on trains, in Wolverhampton that have been ready to go and been told we're waiting because we've been told basically we need to let the other train through first and predominantly that's when you're on a London Midland one, and you have to let Virgin through."

Birmingham group, Commuter, Older





Little sense of relationship felt with TOC

- Most customers didn't feel a sense of 'relationship' with their operator, despite the amount of time (commuters in particular) spent using the service
- Passengers did refer to London Midland as a 'local' service and synonymous with the region
- Many associated the extent to which they felt they had a 'relationship' with London Midland on the amount of staff interaction they had
 - Passengers who had more and positive interactions with staff felt more of a connection with the TOC
- Passengers felt that they might feel more of a relationship with London Midland if the TOC did more to show that they valued their customers and rewarded their loyalty
 - For example, through loyalty schemes, special offers and discounts.

"I'd like something that makes you think when you're sitting on that train, I'm not just sitting on any old train, oh I'm sitting on a London Midland train, and actually they're quite pleased I am."
Birmingham group, Leisure, Older

"The Twitter guy is friendly. When I think of London Midland I think of the guy on the Twitter feed, because he's personable, you can always have a joke with him. If the drivers and the conductors, if they were a bit more personable."
Birmingham group, Commuter, Younger

"No I don't feel valued as a customer, not when I have to stand on a crowded, hot, smelly train which was 10 minutes late to begin with!"
Northampton group, Business, Younger

"Maybe they should hand out some sort of feedback forms on the train, that would make it look like at least they care."
Crewe group, Commuter, Younger

Summary and Conclusions



Experience of travelling on London Midland

- Overall, passengers perceive travel with the London Midland service to be cheaper relative to other operators in their area
- However, they feel the service they get is lacking in several aspects, particularly with regards to disruptions and service level:
 - There are frequent disruptions, including delays and last minute cancellations
 - Delays sometimes mean a train will 'skip' scheduled calling points in order to make up time
 - Disruptions are not well communicated and passengers don't know what the impact on their travel will be, what their alternatives are, or what the reasons are
 - Communications at the station are not always up to date, often being less informative than the Twitter feed or online resources (e.g. National Rail website)
 - Peak services are regularly overcrowded
 - Passengers don't feel the number of carriages provided on services are reflective of demand
- In addition, while many perceive cost of travel to be reasonable, not everyone feels they are getting the best deal:
 - Many find it difficult to establish what the cheapest ticket is for their travel, without staff assistance
 - Irregular and part-time workers feel there are insufficient ticket types available to give them good value for money
 - Regular travellers face annual price increases, without always seeing service improvements
- Whilst the environment at the station and on board the train are not of highest priority, some issues are identified:
 - Small stations lack basic facilities, e.g. shelter, adequate lighting, toilets or vending points
 - Trains are considered basic and have a sub-optimal layout for busy services or luggage space
 - They are often perceived as unclean, with insufficient rubbish bins and a lack of cleaning staff.



Most desired improvements: in a nutshell

Problem avoidance

- Clearer communication of ticket options and fares
- More carriages on existing trains at peak hours
- Better scheduling of trains to avoid delays

Information about problems

- Better communication about delays and cancellations at stations and prior to arrival (e.g. Twitter, email, text...)
- More and better informed staff on trains and platforms to assist in the event of cancellations or delays

Problem resolution

- Making delay repayment scheme easier to use and more visible
- Allowing tickets to be interchangeable with other TOCs (e.g. Virgin Trains) in case of disruption

Distraction

- Cleaner carriages and toilets on board the train
- Wi-Fi and plug sockets on board trains



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