



SPA
Future
Thinking



Department for
Transport



Passenger Assist Mystery shopping research presentation

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Prepared for: Passenger Focus | Ref: jn1566/NA/JM | Date: January/2014

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Contents

→ Passenger Focus foreword	p3
→ Background, research objectives and methodology	p5
→ Key findings	p9
→ Journey planning and booking	p11
→ Accessing stations	p20
→ Boarding	p25
→ On board	p33
→ Alighting	p37
→ Overall journey experience	p43
→ Passenger Focus conclusions and recommendations	p47



Passenger Focus foreword

Passenger Assist (PA) is a National Rail service for train operating companies (TOCs) to book assistance and reservations for disabled rail passengers. PA replaced the previous booking system, Assisted Passenger Reservation System (APRS), in spring 2012.

In 2008 and again in 2010 we carried out research into the efficiency of the APRS. The results showed the industry had some way to go to give disabled passengers full confidence in using the railway. Since we presented those findings and made a number of recommendations the industry has made changes based on them. For example, increasing the number of meeting points and standardising the provision of booking confirmation. It also introduced the new PA system.

With the support of Network Rail and the Department for Transport we have now repeated the previous research to test the service again. As before, we asked passengers with disabilities to make a series of journeys and to report back on their experiences – the best judge of a system being those who actually have to use it. This report is based on their experiences.



Passenger Focus foreword

We welcome the fact that the research shows the booking process generally offers a good experience for passengers, but it also found that there is a need for a more consistent delivery of assistance. While many passengers receive the service they book, others still do not. Uncertainty creates a stressful experience for some passengers. Our recommendations (from slide 51) point towards focussing on continuous performance improvements across the whole delivery process.

The challenge for the industry is to build on the foundation already established and to maximise the potential of the new system and to identify where the delivery of the service to passengers needs to be improved.



Background, research objectives and methodology

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Project background

Research objectives

Mystery shopping exercise to measure the quality of services provided to disabled passengers who book assistance for rail journeys via Passenger Assist (PA)

- We specifically reviewed:
 - passenger experience of booking assistance through PA
 - the effectiveness of the service offered by the rail company when undertaking journeys for which help has been booked through PA.

- The research:
 - identifies areas of excellence
 - identifies areas for improvement
 - measures changes between 2013 and the survey carried out in 2010





Sample and methodology

Four broad groups of disabled mystery shoppers booked and conducted pre-defined rail journeys

Shopper type 1

10 Wheelchair users (WCHR)
40 return journeys

Shopper type 2

11 Mobility impairment (MI)
44 return journeys

Shopper type 3

9 Visual impairment (VI)
28 return journeys

Shopper type 4

(NEW)
2 Cognitive impairment** (CI)
7 return journeys

119 Journeys

Journey stages:

Reservation for Outward
Reservation for Return
Make Return journey

Reservation methods



At station
(4 Journeys)



Telephone
(227 Journeys)



Online
(7 Journeys)

Train Operating Companies (TOCs) operating in:
England, Wales, and Scotland evaluated

Fieldwork dates: 7 September – 25 October

Mop-up: Nov-5 December

Analysis based on:

- Number of journeys
- Number of occurrences



Due to rounding % may not always add to 100%

*** Cognitive impairment covers Asperger's and mild learning difficulties*



Preparing the mystery shoppers

All shoppers were trained on the journey requirements.

pre-qualification criteria

Role of
mystery
shopper

Booking the
journey

Making the
journey to
specification

Impartiality
of assessment

Reporting
back

Project challenges

- Disabled mystery shoppers are real passengers; whilst we had trained them they still experienced barriers related to travel.
- This makes the project more reflective of reality; however in a few instances:
 - shoppers did not allow 24 hours between booking and making journey
 - they were late arriving at the station
 - shoppers did not always ask about facilities available at stations or on train.





Key findings

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→ Key messages

Overall, PA electronic booking system works well. However, there is need for clearer communication and better link with front-line staff to minimise service failure

Booking System

- National Rail Enquiries effectively directing passengers to Train Operating Companies (TOCs) but sometimes at a greater cost than if they redial.
- TOC staff generally perceived as professional, friendly and helpful
 - but passengers not always given essential or helpful information at time of booking
- PA not consistently booking seats or wheelchair spaces (where reservations are available) or asking information on ramp requirements, even to passengers with mobility impairments.
- No uniformity - passengers get different information even from same TOC.
- Standard questions not asked – sometimes not even the passenger's name.
- Some passenger still not given a booking reference number.

The Journey

- Booking requirements not always reaching station and on-train staff.
- Passengers not consistently provided with assistance to board and/or alight from trains for booked journeys.
- Some passenger confused about key information; where to meet staff? who will provide assistance?
- Passengers need greater clarity about on-train accommodation, that is priority seats and wheelchair spaces, due to rolling stock and reservation differences between TOCs.



Journey planning and booking

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→ Interacting with National Rail Enquiries

National Rail staff predominantly following correct procedure

Polite greeting

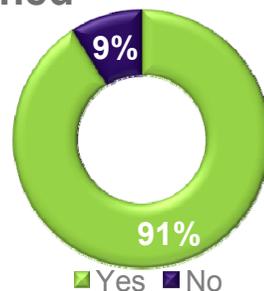


→ National Rail Enquiries (NRE) staff are considered polite, however when calls are transferred passengers continue to accrue costs

“Biggest moan is about National Rail Enquiries being 0845 number, as on many phones this call could have cost £2 to £3.”
WCHR

Q1.4/4.44. Did the member of staff greet you politely?
Base: All telephone bookings: 277

Booking procedure explained

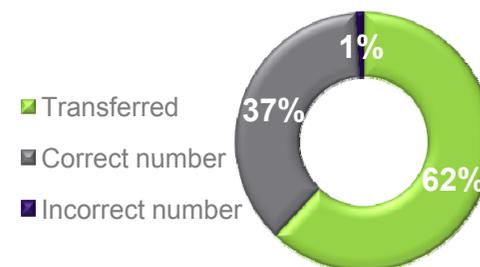


→ Few instances of incorrect information being provided to passengers



Q1.5/4.45. Did the National Rail Enquiries staff explain that you must contact the Train Operating Company to book assistance?
Base: All telephone bookings: 277

Call handling



→ Significant increase in number of calls directly transferred to TOCs (10 per cent in 2010)

“Provided number for wrong TOC by National Rail, but they were happy to book the assistance anyway.” CI

Q1.6/1.46. Did they give you a number to call?
Base: All telephone bookings: 277

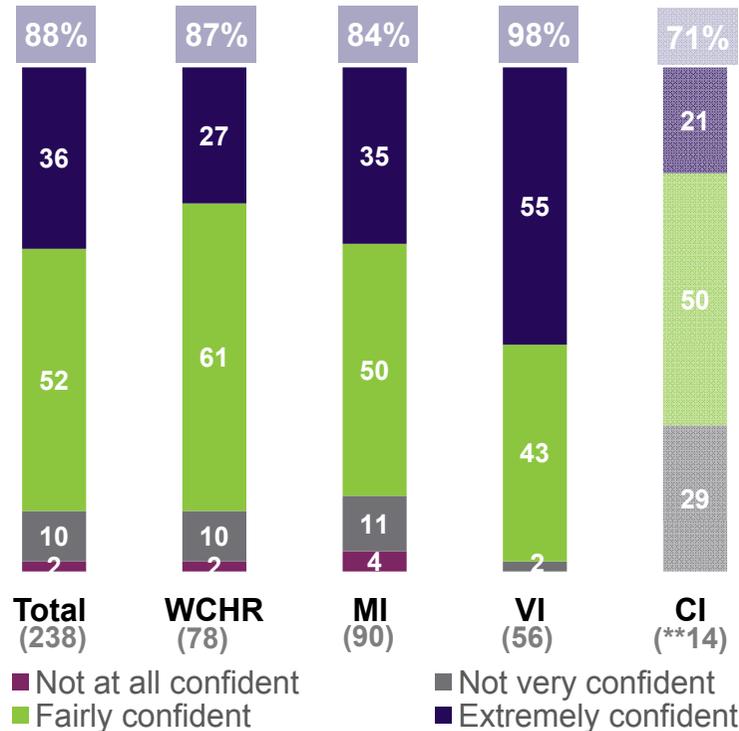


Rating of Passenger Assist

Most indicated that they were confident their needs would be met

Confidence levels in line with 2010 (84 per cent)

Confidence with booking

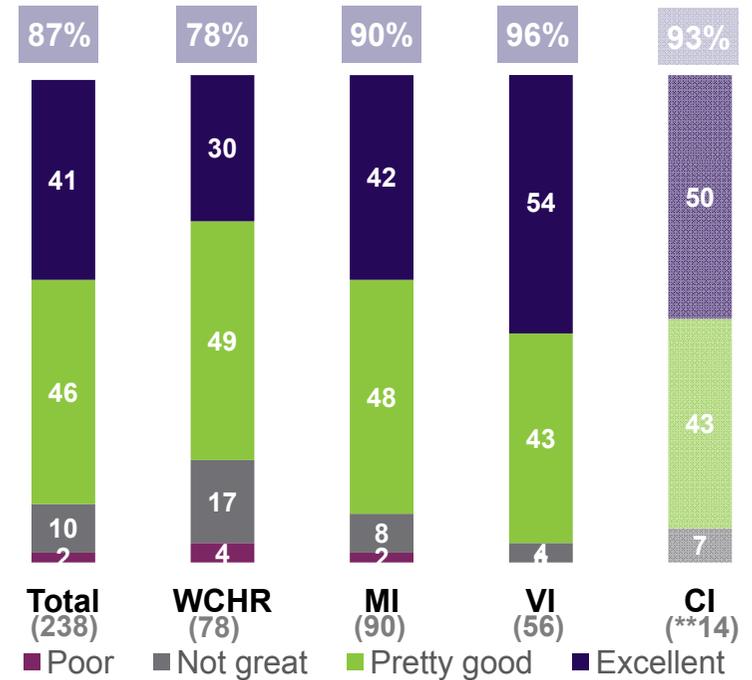


Q1.37/1.66 Did the information provided make you feel confident that your needs would be met when you arrived at the station?

Base: All shoppers **Denotes very low base

At times there is a disconnect between booking and the actual service received on journey

Overall rating of booking experience



Q1.39/1.68 Overall, how would you rate the booking staff in terms of the helpfulness and service provided?

Base: All shoppers **Denotes very low base

→ Rating of Passenger Assist (2013 versus 2010)

Consistent with 2010, staff continue to be perceived as helpful and offering a good service



Q1.39/1.68 Overall, how would you rate the booking staff in terms of the helpfulness and service provided?

Base: All shoppers

Although staff are helpful and polite, at times there is lack on uniformity in the information obtained from and provided to passengers

“The overall rating was good at the time but I later learned that I had not been given information about accessibility for the destination. I had to get in touch and change the details.” WCHR

“Whilst the staff member was very polite I was left wondering how will they know who I am? I don't look disabled, no outward signs of my disability.” MI

“Very thorough, said it couldn't be guaranteed as was a late request, but would leave message to morning shift to chase up with the station.” MI



Journey plan information

Marked improvement in aspects of information provided at booking stage. However, some bookings not going through to service delivery staff

	2013 (Base: 238)	2010	2008
Getting to station early	82% ↑	72%	58%
Inquire about method of arriving at station	72%	67%	64%
Mention of meeting point	45%	38%	49%
Advised to tell a member of station staff of arrival	78%	70%	56%
Seat/wheelchair reservation	42%	-	-
Inquire about how passenger would leave station	71% ↑	59%	58%

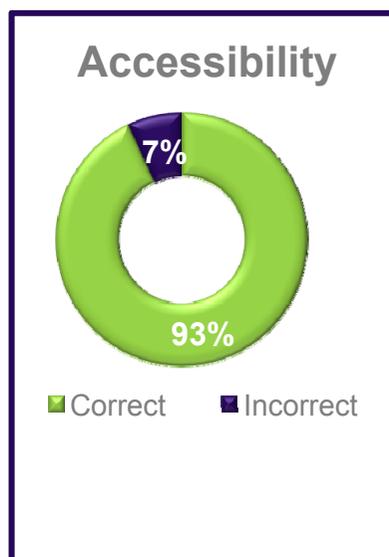
“Staff were helpful and friendly. They explained to me that it was not possible to reserve a seat on the train, and I noticed she typed on to the Assist email that they were to take me to the priority seating.” MI



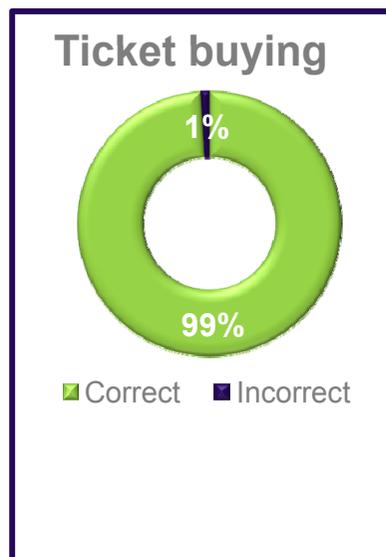
Station facilities information

Overall, passengers who inquire at point of booking are getting the correct information about availability of most facilities

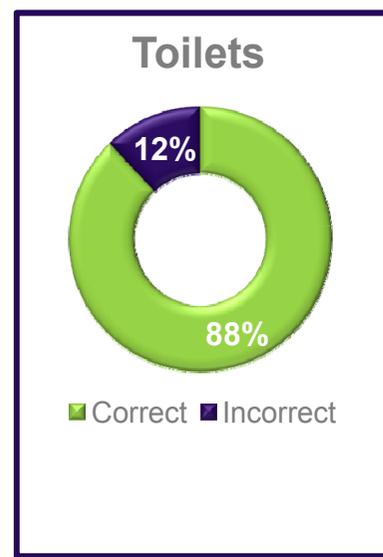
The information about facilities provided to passengers at booking stage was checked against station details provided on the NRE website to confirm whether staff were providing passengers with accurate information



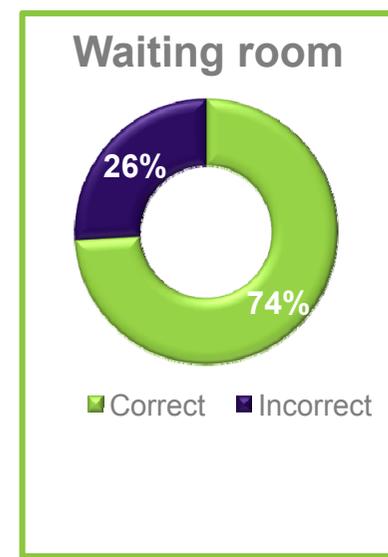
Q1.25a/1.55a/ Q1.26a/1.56a
Did a member of staff tell you that the starting/destination station-Was fully accessible
Base: All enquiring: 348



Q1.25d/1.55d. Did a member of staff tell you that the starting station-Has ticket-buying facilities
Base: All enquiring: 160



Q1.25b/1.55b. Did a member of staff tell you that the starting station-Has an accessible toilet?
Base: All enquiring: 60



Q1.25c/1.55c. Did a member of staff tell you that the starting station-Has an accessible waiting room?
Base: All enquiring: 120

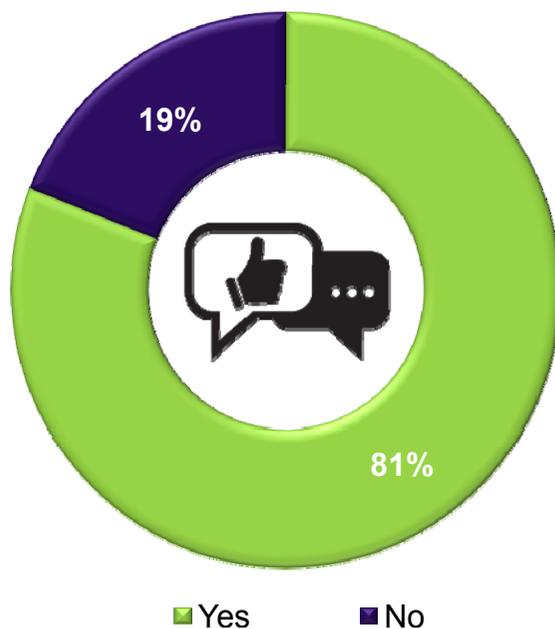
→ Confirming Passenger Assist booking

Passengers not consistently receiving their reference and confirmation of the booking. Virtually all (98 per cent) confirmations were sent via email

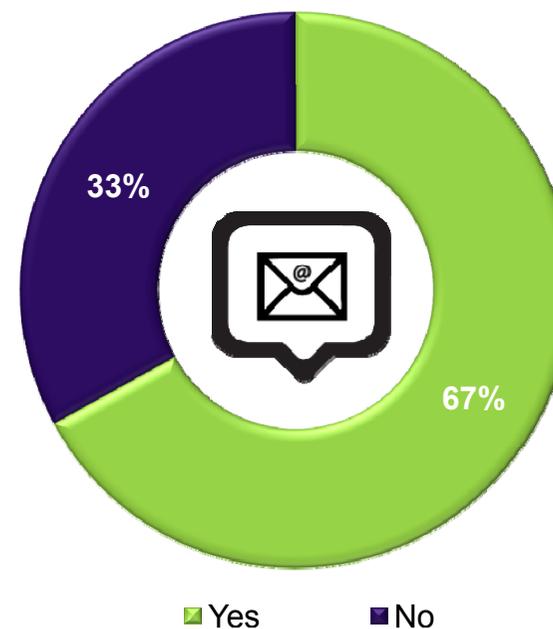
There is consistency with referencing across TOCs; majority given a Passenger Assist specific reference, for example, PA 09126271452

Confirmation of journey detail important as an aide-memoire for passengers as well as evidence when assistance not readily offered

Receipt of booking reference



Receipt of confirmation



Q1.35/1.64 Were you given a Passenger Assist reference number?
Base: All Journeys: 238

Q1.35b/1.64b Did you receive a confirmation of your bookings?
Base: All Journeys with reservation numbers: 193



Booking summary

Booking process generally good – but inconsistencies can lead to problems for passengers



National Rail Enquiries (NRE)

- 99 per cent receive the correct number or are transferred by NRE
- 99 per cent of National Rail Enquiries contacts were polite
- 91 per cent of calls included an explanation of the process by NRE



Passenger Assist (PA)

- 87 per cent of experiences considered pretty good or excellent
 - Slight improvement on 2010
- 83 per cent of passengers advised to arrive at the station early
- 78 per cent of passengers advised to tell a member of staff when they arrived
- 72 and 71 per cent of passengers asked about how they would get to and from the station respectively
- Several passengers report PA already had information about their situation on their system



- 45 per cent were not informed of a meeting point
- 33 per cent did not receive an email confirmation of their booking
- 19 per cent did not recognise that they had been given a booking reference
- Passengers report inconsistencies in the questions asked by different TOCs – this can lead to assumptions being made. For example that the TOC will know the passenger needs a ramp.



To improve bookings

Consistency is the key factor

- Harmonise questions and requirements asked by all TOCs and in all situations. For example, the need for a ramp.
- Make passengers aware of service they can expect at stations and on board
- Ensure booking staff have necessary knowledge of station and train facilities
- Provide a standard booking confirmation laying out exactly what passengers will receive
- Ensure all members of staff (including on-train) receive all relevant information.

“A general comment I've made before but is relevant to all my bookings. Depending on which train company I call I get asked different questions. Even when calling the same TOC this happens too. Questions need to be more systemised to ensure the right info is given. I shouldn't have to prompt but sometimes I have to.” WCHR



Accessing stations

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Arriving at station...

When advised of a meeting place - passengers were only met at designated point seven out of ten times

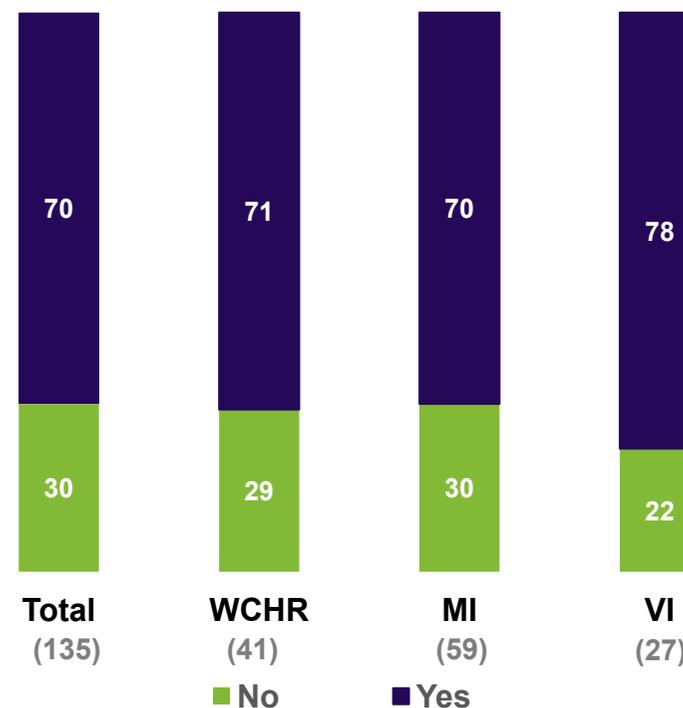
- Passengers were advised to meet at a specified point on **45 per cent** of bookings
 - However; only **70 per cent** of passengers report being met by a member of staff at the appointed place
- **78 per cent** of the time passengers were advised to seek out a member of staff when they arrived at the station

“When I arrived I noticed a sign for disabled assistance and realised that there is a dedicated area for disabled customers with a check in desk and seating.” WCHR

“I went to the main desk and asked for assistance. When I informed her that I was visually impaired she indicated where the member of staff was rather than asking them to come to me.” VI

In 2010, 70 per cent of passengers were met at the appointed place (58 per cent in 2008)

Meeting at appointed place



Q4.6a/13.6a Were you met by a member of staff at appointed place?
Base: All Journeys where passengers advised of meeting place at booking (Total includes CI)

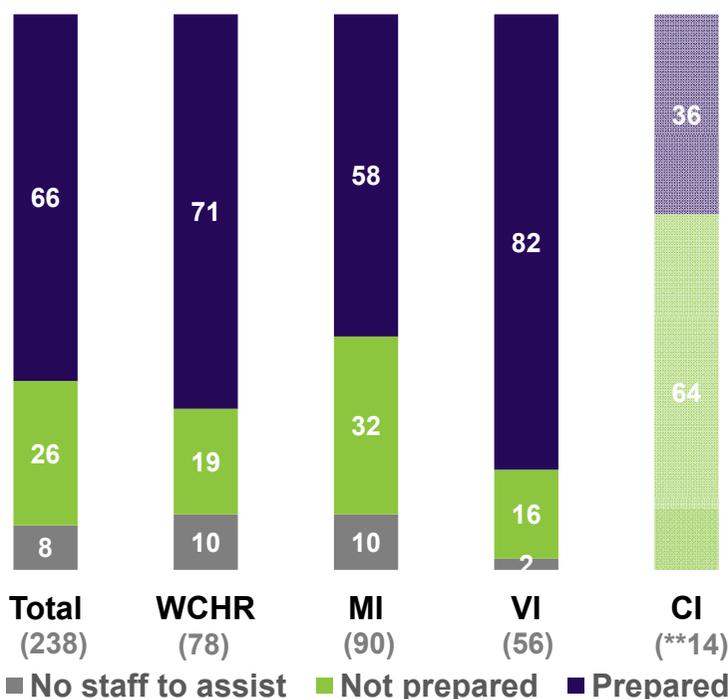


Arriving at station...

One in four passengers felt staff were unprepared for their arrival at the station

In 2010, station staff were prepared for passengers for 65 per cent of journeys

Staff preparedness on arrival



➔ Staff most likely to be prepared when expecting wheelchair users or passengers with a visual impairment

“I was told to go to the mobility assistance and press the buzzer, but what I did not know is that there are two areas of mobility assistance at this station. One outside of the station area which in fact is for the shuttle service to the airport, and one inside the station which is for the trains. Although I did explain to the person who answered me that I needed assistance onto the train, they did not send anyone to me for over 45 minutes, which resulted in my missing the train that I had booked to be on.” MI

“It turned out to be very good, as I walked into the station a member of staff was there. He knew of me (my name) and asked me to sit and wait, confirmed what I wanted (wheelchair) and told me what they were going to do (take me to the platform) and where to wait.” CI

Q4.5/Q13.5 Were relevant staff prepared for you when you arrived at the station?

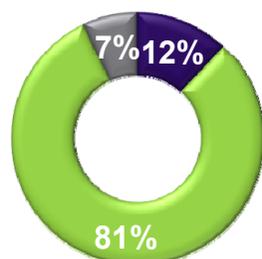
Base: All Journeys **Denotes very low base



Station and train accessibility

Passengers are being offered alternative arrangements when travelling from inaccessible stations

Advised of accessibility



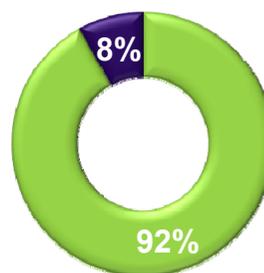
■ Inaccessible ■ Accessible ■ N/A

➔ Accessibility for passengers goes beyond ability to use station. Some perceive using a route specifically for disabled passengers to access a platform as inaccessible

Q1.33/1.61. Did Passenger Assist staff advise you that your Starting or Destination station was inaccessible?

Base: All WCHR and MI: 168

Ability to access station



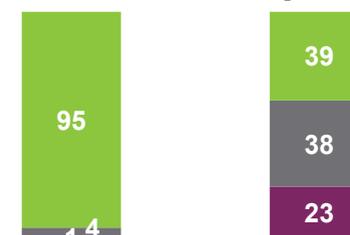
■ Able to access ■ Not able to access

➔ Nearly all who could not access station were provided with a taxi to accessible station

Q3.1/12.1-8.1/17.1. Was the station accessible?

Base: All Journeys-WCHR and MI: 336

Provision of ramps



WCHR

MI

■ Needed but not requested ■ No ■ Yes

➔ Wheelchair users provided with ramps on almost all journeys
➔ Passengers with mobility impairments not always offered ramps at time of booking

Q4.9/13.9-5.15/14.15-6.5/15.5-7.15/16.15. If you required a ramp to board or get off the train and you requested it, was it provided?

Base: WCHR and MI: 363 occasions



To improve assistance at starting station

Consistency and managing expectations are key

- Provide passengers with a consistent approach for getting help and assistance at stations to avoid confusion:
 - either a designated meeting point
 - or by contacting staff.
- Ensure staff are ready for the passenger's arrival:
 - provide staff with consistent and full information.
- Provide ramp if needed whether booked or not
- Passengers' assistance booking confirmations could be used to confirm assistance requests in case of queries/doubt.



Boarding

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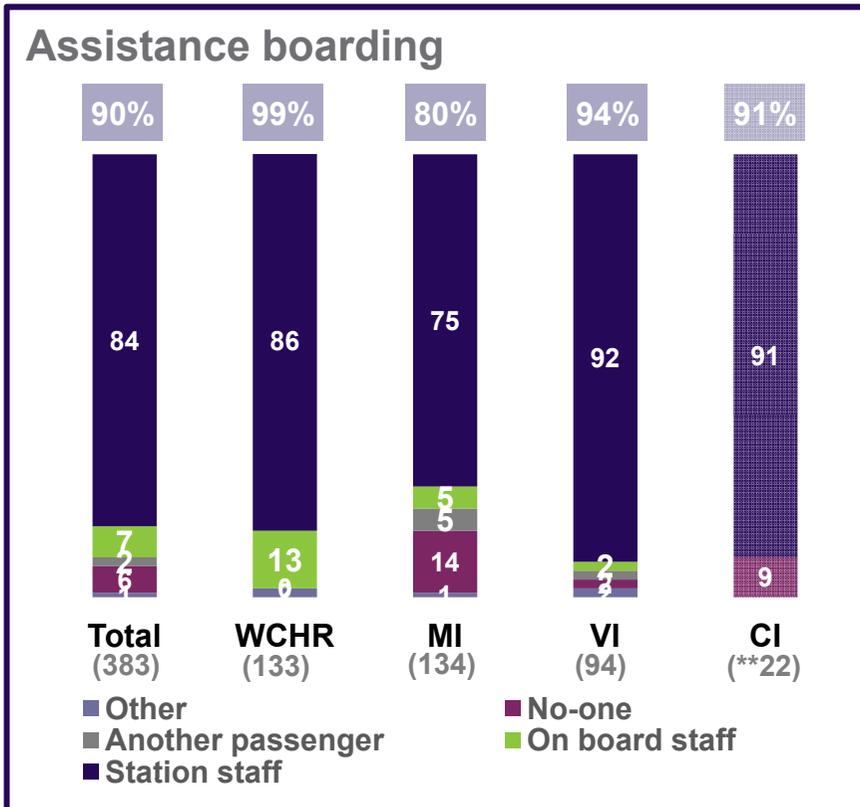
inspiration



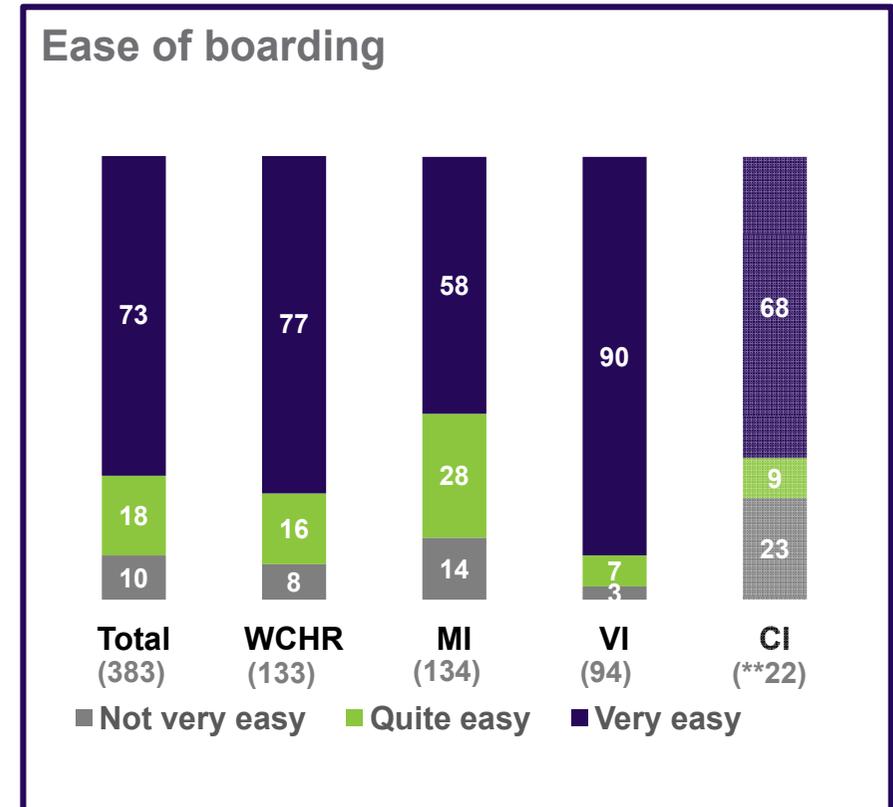
Experience boarding the train

Staff generally providing assistance to passengers when boarding. However, nine per cent of journeys carried out with no staff assistance for boarding

Lack of ramps has impact on MI passengers
Luggage in wheelchair space disruptive for WCHR



Q4.11/13.11-6.7/15.7 Who assisted you with boarding the train?
Base: All Journeys **Denotes very low base



Q4.12/13.12-6.8/15.8. Please rate how easy you found it to board the train
Base: All Journeys: **Denotes very low base



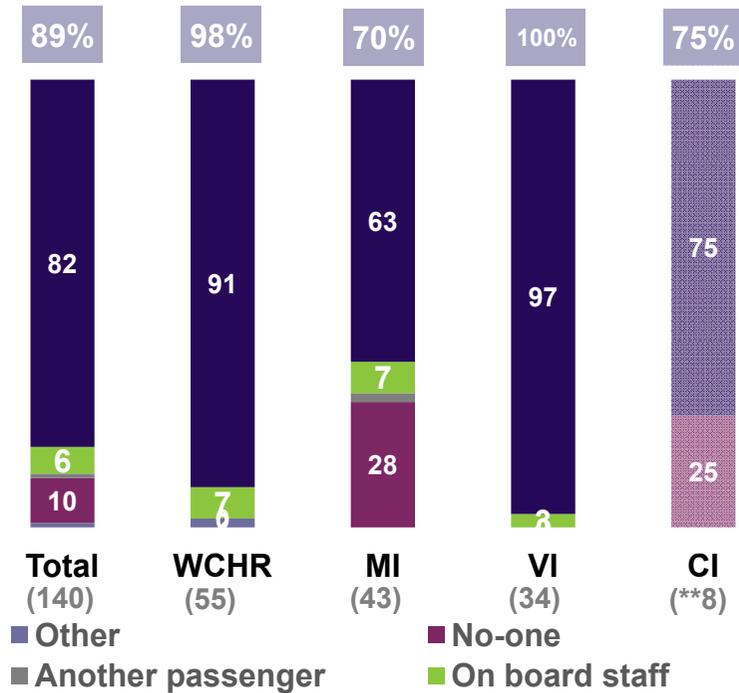
Experience boarding the train

Passengers with connecting journeys are generally being assisted with transfers

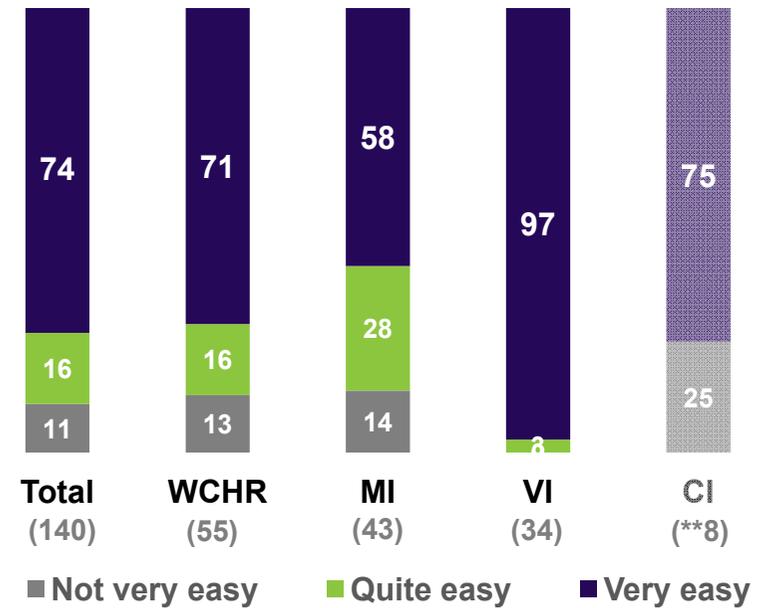
One in ten passengers not assisted to board connecting train

Although assistance provided for wheelchair users; there are some issues around space not being available

Assistance boarding (connecting journeys)



Ease of boarding (connecting journeys)



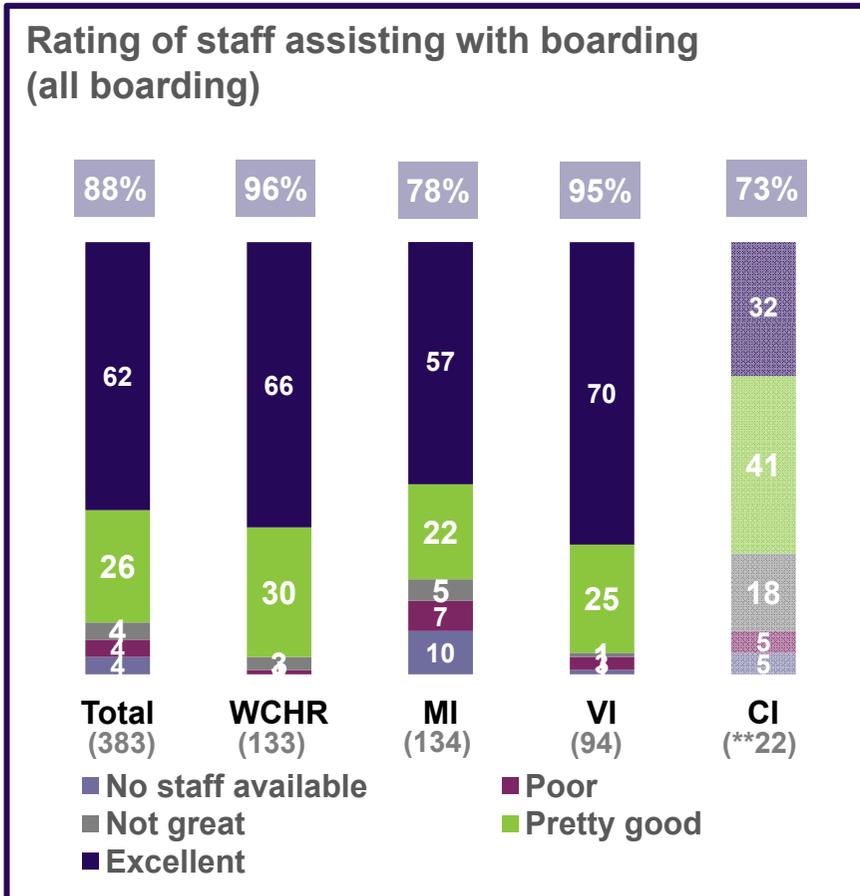
Q6.7/15.7 Who assisted you with boarding the train?
Base: All connecting journeys **Denotes very low base

Q6.8/15.8 Please rate how easy you found it to board the train
Base: All connecting journeys: **Denotes very low base



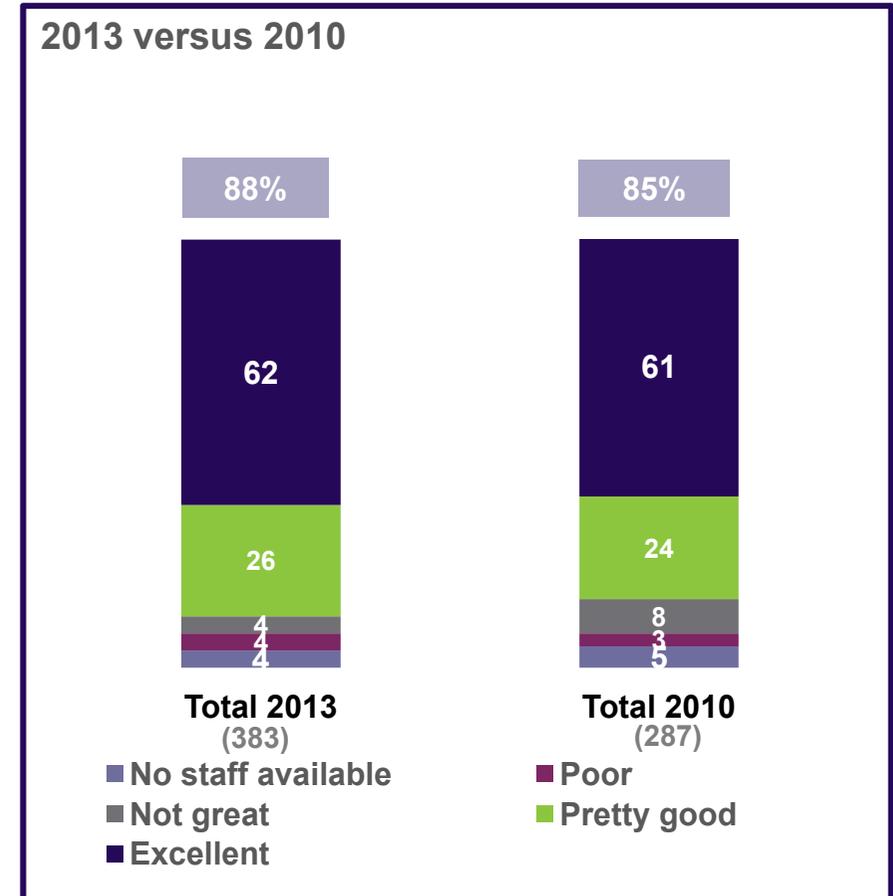
Assistance with boarding

Reflective of the higher level of assistance offered, wheelchair users and passengers with visual impairments are most positive about staff assistance



Q4.14 /13.14/6.10/15.1 How would you rate the staff who assisted you to board the train?

Base: All journeys **Denotes very low base



Q4.14/13.14-6.10/15.10 How would you rate the staff who assisted you to board the train?

Base: All journeys



Boarding comments...

Lapses in service provision and delivery can have a serious impact on the journey experience for some disabled passengers

The problems with boarding range from staff not turning up to board passengers to safety concerns

"I was only shown where the lift was and which platform I was to go to. I was not asked if I needed help. I said I had booked assistance, but staff did not check." MI

"The step from platform to train was high, I waited for the conductor, but [there was] no sign of him, [and] no staff to ask for help. [I] Asked another passenger if she would be kind enough to help me." MI

"I was parked in the gangway. It was quite unnerving."
WCHR

"When the train pulled in the assistance still hadn't arrived so I couldn't get to my coach. I shouted out to a member of staff who ran to fetch the wheelchair and took me to my coach, causing a delay" MI

"Although I use a wheelchair, it appeared that on-train staff were unaware that ramps were needed until the train pulled in." WCHR (at an unstaffed station)

"I had to find staff myself as the ones waiting for me were on the wrong platform."
WCHR

"On arrival at the station where I changed, my connecting train was already standing at an adjacent platform and I was immediately assisted to a seat." VI



Good practice...

In the majority of cases staff manage to deliver an exceptional service and passengers are complimentary of the assistance for boarding

Some staff are being proactive and implementing processes that ensure that passengers are provided with assistance at all points of the journey

“Safe and easy. I was escorted all the way.” VI

“Station staff got onto the train with me and guided me to the seat. He checked I was OK before he left.” VI

“He helped me to get on the train and find my seat and said he would call my destination station to make sure they were expecting me.” MI

“Staff informed the conductor on the train that I needed assistance. He held other passenger back so I could board the train.” MI

“Comfortable, staff held my crutches and helped me onto the train and to a seat. Confirmed someone would meet me at my destination.” MI

“They took me on a route which involved minimal changes of level and boarding was easy.” MI

“Experienced staff [member] said he would radio ahead as we were on a later train.” WCHR

“After notifying station staff, they took me over to the platform and assisted me to my seat. They also informed the conductor that I was on the train, and asked him to assist me off once the service arrived at my destination station.” CI



Getting to the seat

There is evidence that when passengers are not seated in pre-booked seats there can be confusion and a lapse in service provision

	Total	MI	VI	**CI
Assisted to seat (245)	73%	61%	90%	73%
Sat in booked priority seat (54)	59%	54%	73%	63%
Accessibility of seat (250)	96%	96%	98%	91%

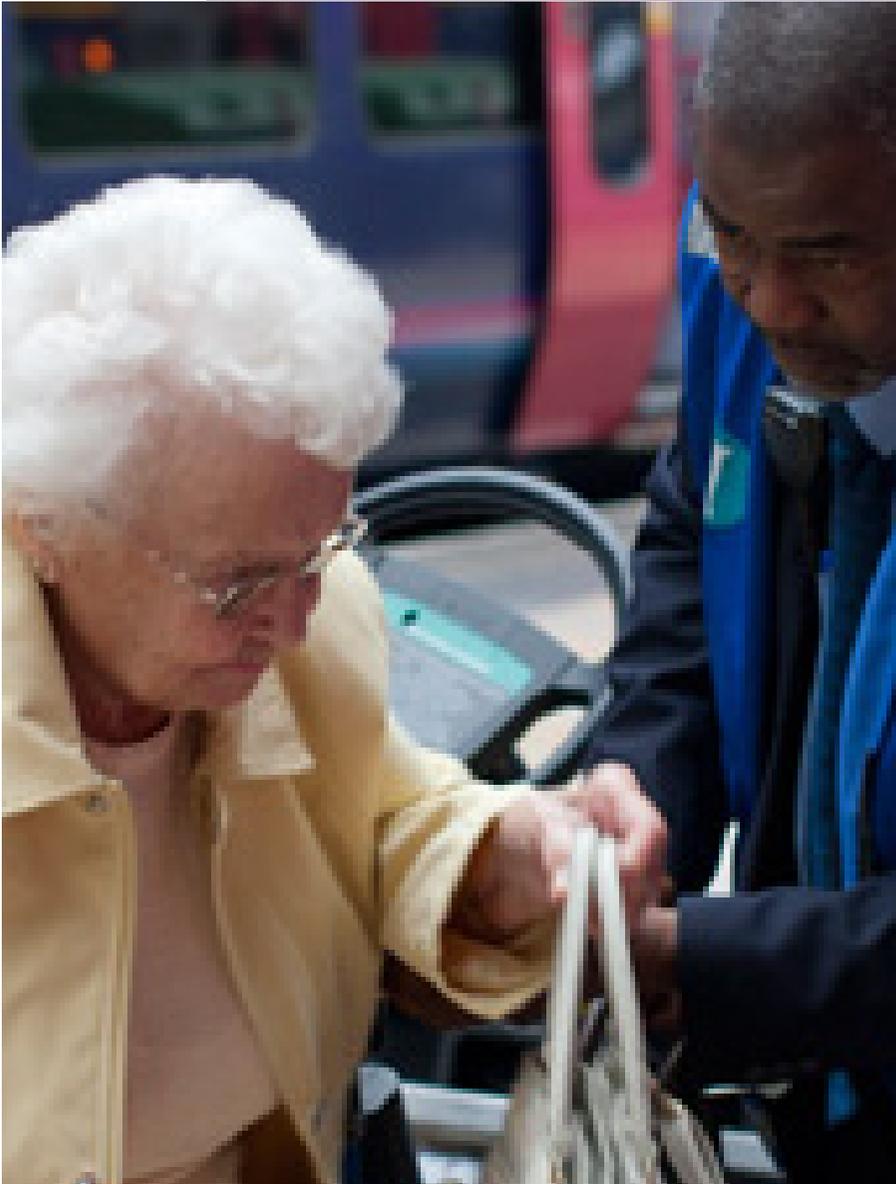
	Wheelchair users
Availability of pre-booked wheelchair space (66)	68%
Assistance to space provided by staff (128)	84%
Availability of equipment (128)	66%

- Pre-booked wheelchair spaces were not available for a number of reasons including the train not actually having a dedicated wheelchair space.
- Passengers who indicated that the pre-booked wheelchair space was not available found an alternative space so they could travel on intended train.

**Denotes very low base



To improve boarding



Delivering the process as booked

- TOCs should provide the assistance in line with the booking.
- Staff training needs to be consistent, especially with respect to dealing with passengers with hidden disabilities and passengers with cognitive impairments:
 - Staff should never assume that a passenger does not need assistance if it has been booked.
- More consistency in ensuring passengers are in their booked accommodation will help them and staff:
 - ensure passengers are in their reserved place where this applies
 - on non-reservable trains staff should inform the alighting station where and in which coach the passenger is.
- Ensure ramps are easily available for passengers who need them.



On-board

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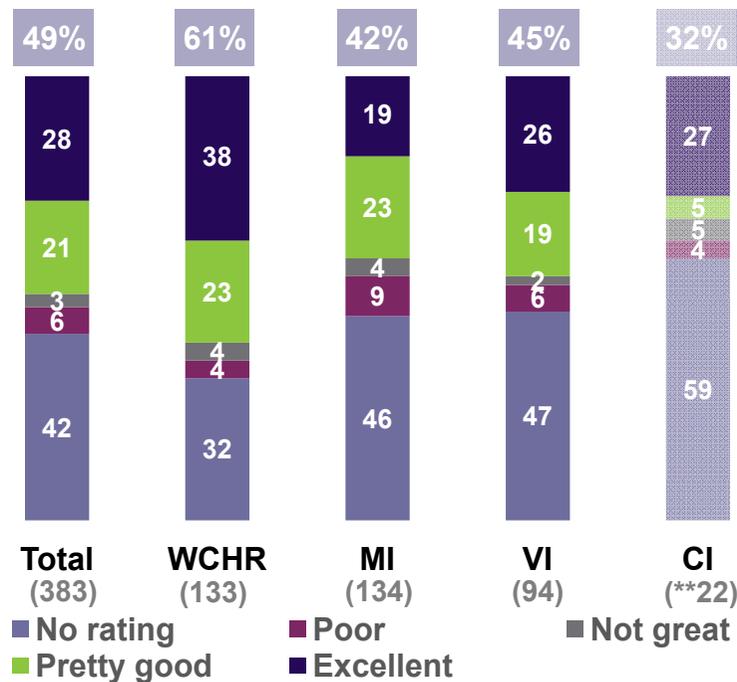


On-board staff performance

Passengers interaction with staff are generally positive. However, there is a lack of clarity on the service level expectations from on-train staff

Variance in support provided on board across TOCs

Overall on-train staff rating All passengers

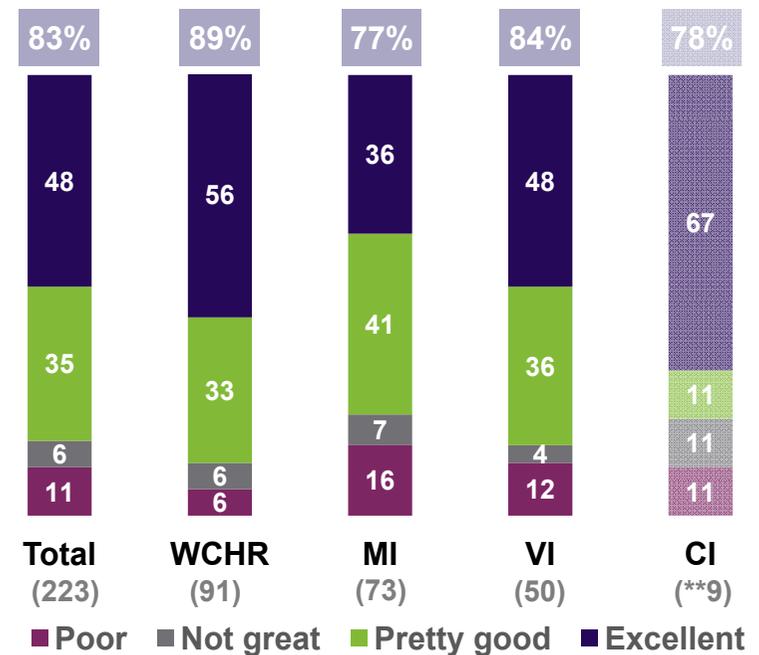


QQ5.12/14.12-7.12/16.12 How would you rate the on-train staff's assistance?

Base: All journeys **Denotes very low base

Overall satisfaction with on-train staff in line with 2010 (85 per cent)

All passengers interacting with staff and giving a rating



QQ5.12/14.12-7.12/16.12 How would you rate the on-train staff's assistance?

Base: All journeys with staff interaction: **Denotes very low base

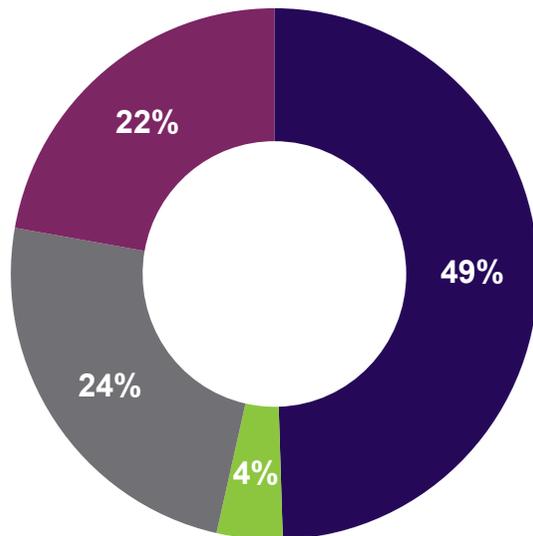


On-board...

Messages are generally being broadcast to passengers. However, failure of announcements can have a particularly negative impact on passengers with visual impairments

“As there were no announcements on the train and no on-board staff I had to ask another passenger which station we had stopped at. Unfortunately, they told me the wrong name and I ended up getting off at the wrong station, one stop early.” VI

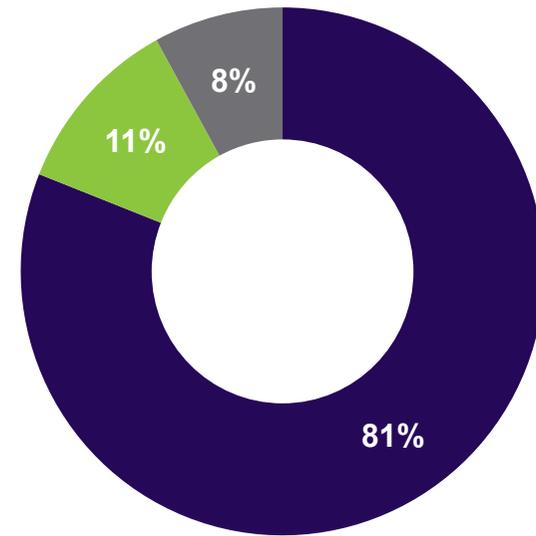
Visual display on train



■ Working ■ Not working ■ No screen ■ Unable to check

Q5.6/14.6/7.6/16.6 Were there electronic visual displays on the train?
Base: All Journeys 378 (excludes visually-impaired)

Announcements during journey



■ Clear and audible ■ Unclear and inaudible
■ No announcements

Q5.7/14.7-7.7/16.7. Were audio announcements made during your journey?
Base: All Journeys 378 (excludes hearing-impaired)

To improve on-board experience



Delivering on expectations

- Announcements and digital information screens need to be provided and working.
- On-train staff should deliver the service which the company has committed to provide – both when booked and as shown in its Disabled People's Protection Policy.
- On-board staff should receive a copy of the passenger's booking details.
- A helpline (available at all times when the trains are running) should be provided for passengers stranded on board trains or in an emergency.

"I didn't see any staff on this one-hour journey. No ticket inspector, no-one." WCHR



Alighting

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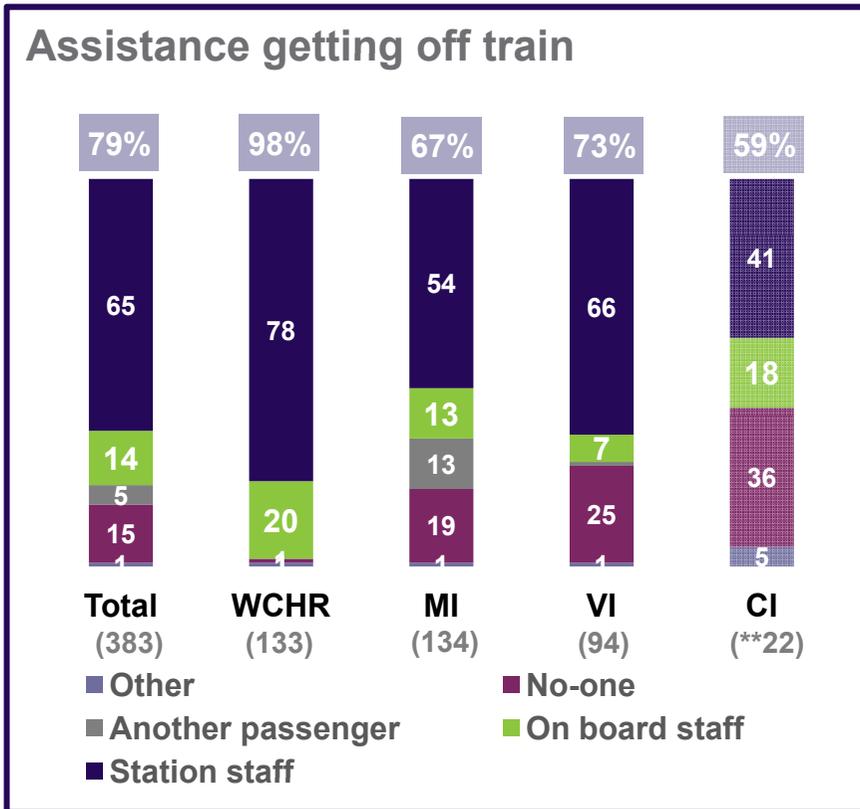
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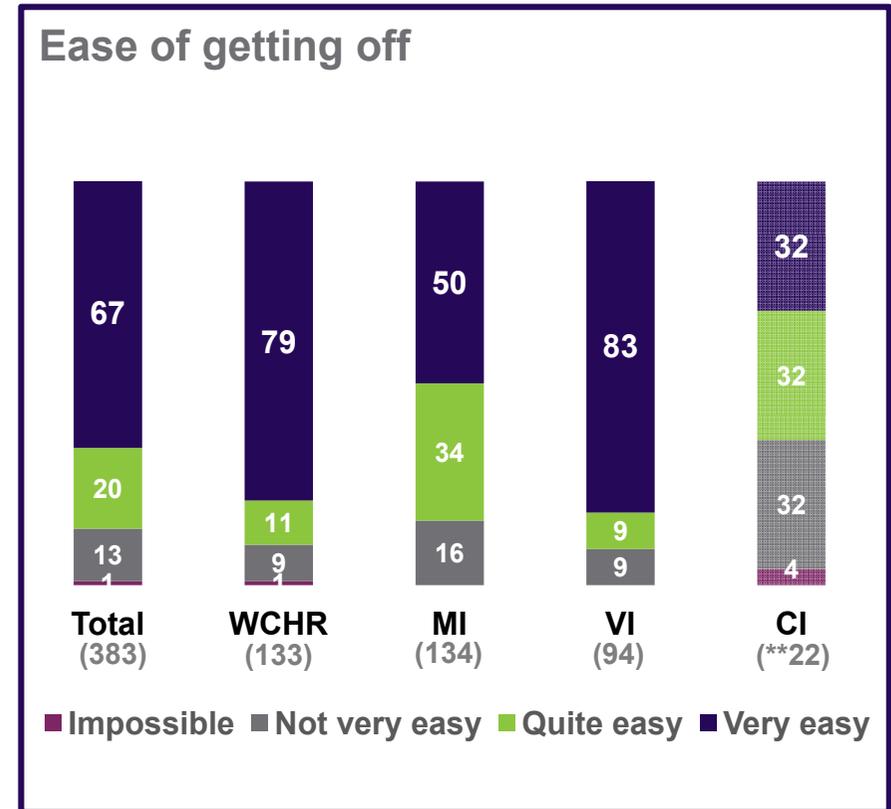
Experience getting off train

Overall, passengers did not receive any staff support alighting for 21 per cent of journeys

Due to lack of assistance, on two occasions passengers were unable to get off the train at their destination station



Q7.17/16.17-5.17/14.17 Who assisted you getting off the train?
Base: All Journeys **Denotes very low base

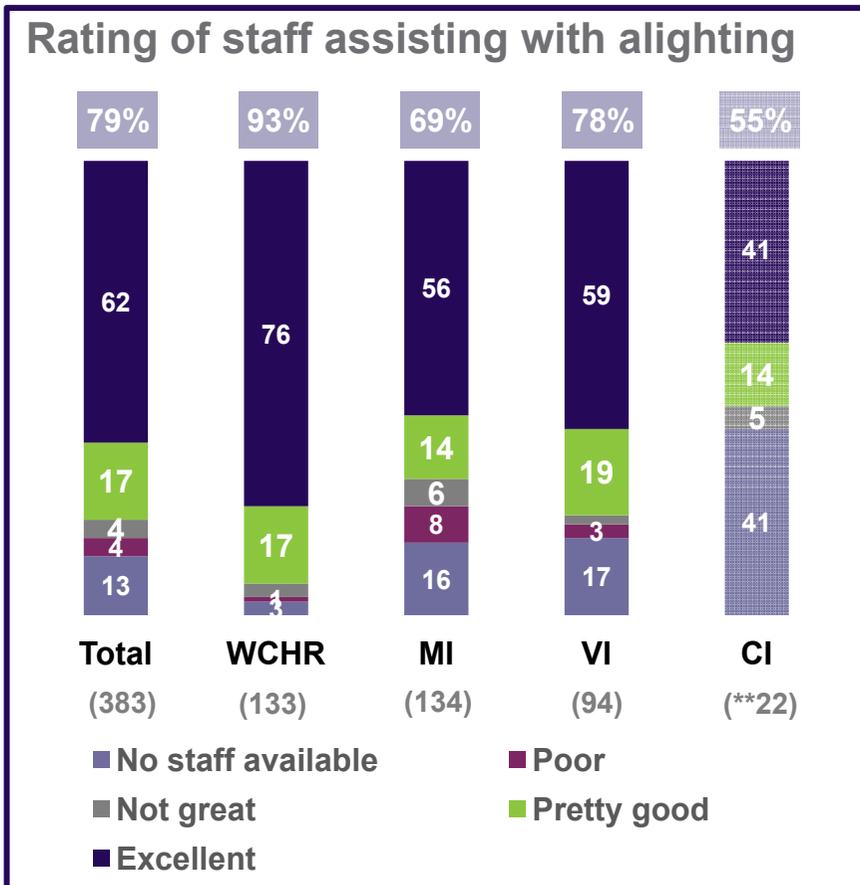


Q5.13/14.13-7.13/16.13 Please rate how easy you found it to get off the train
Base: All Journeys **Denotes very low base

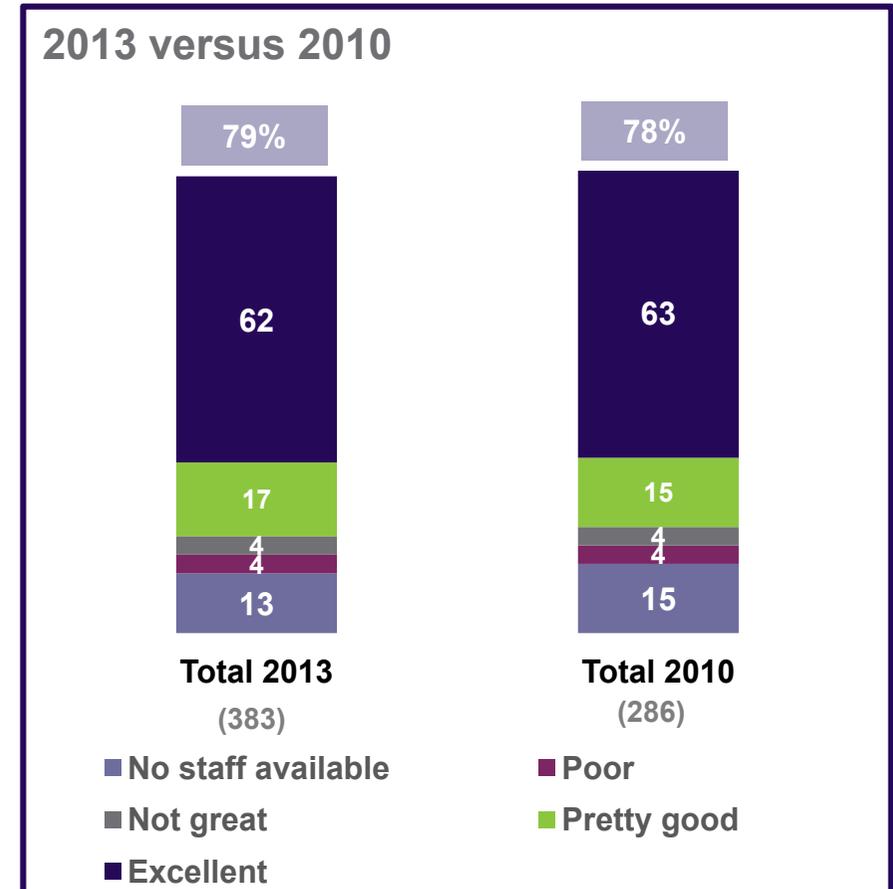


Assistance with alighting

Generally staff are considered to be excellent. However, there are instances when staff are present but no assistance is offered



Q5.19/14.19-7.19/16.19 How would you rate the staff who assisted you to get off the train?
Base: All journeys **Denotes very low base



Q5.19/14.19-7.19/16.19 How would you rate the staff who assisted you to get off the train?
Base: All journeys



Alighting comments

Communication and passenger respect integral to the success of any journey. Journey disruptions also have impact on service provision

"The Passenger Assist team had no information that ramps were needed but they knew I booked wheelchair space on the second train. The information they had was only that I needed assistance with luggage - which I did not and had not requested help with!" WCHR

"Impossible to comment as there was no staff support to enable me to get off the train at my final destination due to problems with the journey earlier on." MI

"There was obviously a lack of communication between the train guards when they changed over and the assistance staff at my destination. They had no idea which part of the train I was in." WCHR

"This was my worst experience. There was a big gap off the train to the platform and I had no help at all to get off." VI

"I waited on the train for a number of minutes and no one turned up, so I had to get off myself." VI

"Although staff were on the platform to help me off they were waiting by the wrong coach." WCHR

"I had to be very careful with my communication about what I needed and I don't like confrontation, so I don't make too much of a fuss, but I feel like I had to almost beg for assistance rather than it being offered freely." CI

"They made me feel like I was a pain to need their help."
WCHR



Good practice

Helpfulness and confidence when delivering assistance valued by passengers

“The staff were waiting for the train to arrive, and knew exactly where I would be sitting on the train.” CI

“Very friendly and efficient even though they were not aware I was going to be on the train.” WCHR

“Member of staff took me to the waiting room and fetched me shortly before my second train arrived.” VI

“The staff were fantastic, once I told them where I was going to and said it wasn't in the station, they offered to wheel me there! I felt this was very generous of them and they wouldn't be expected to do this.” WCHR

“They knew the gap between the platform and train was high, so two station staff were on hand to get me off.” WCHR

“Staff were welcoming and friendly. They helped me off the train and directed me to where I needed to go.” MI

“Staff seemed happy to help and there was no delay in my journey because of waiting for assistance.” WCHR

“The member of staff was helpful and asked if I was going to need further assistance out of the station as there were steps.” VI



To improve alighting

When alighting goes wrong it causes significant problems for passengers

- Clarity in where passengers are located on board would help staff to find them and assist them to alight.
- Advice whether assistance is provided by on-train or station staff.
- Staff need to provide the assistance booked, such as, ramps as necessary.

“Station staff knew I was arriving but were checking the carriages for a wheelchair user. I had to call out to them so that they realised I was walking and they came to me.” MI



Overall journey experience

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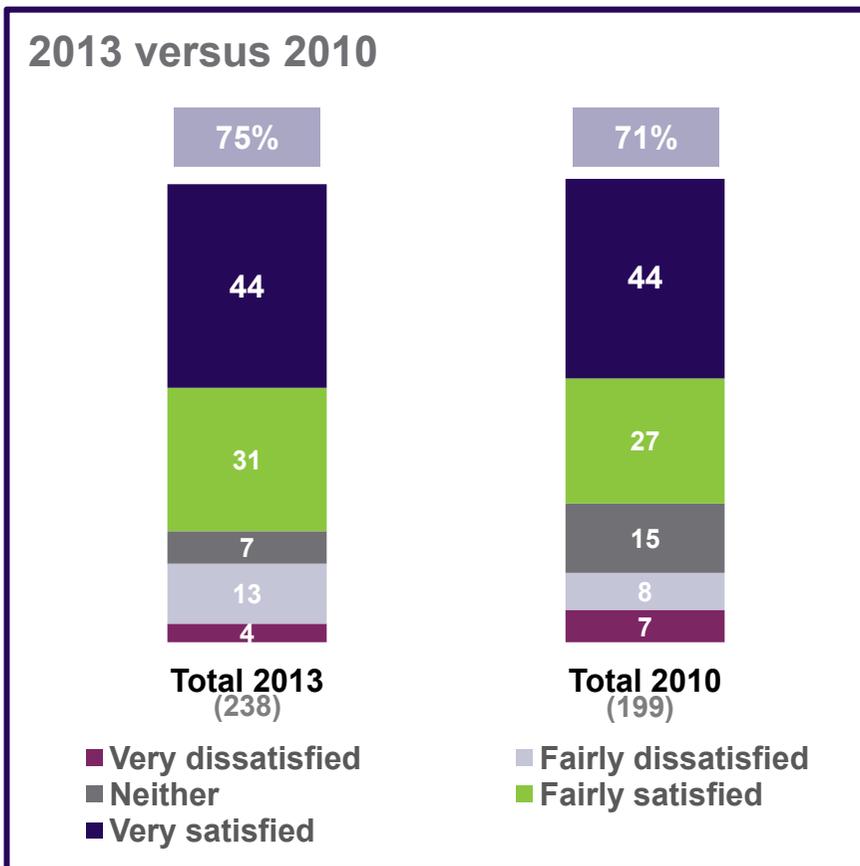
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Overall experience

The majority of passengers are appropriately assisted and staff offer a professional service. However, there are experiences which adversely impact passengers



Q10.1/19.1 Overall, how satisfied were you with the staff assistance provided to you on your outward/return journey?
Base: All journeys

Evidence of low expectations, as some passengers indicate failures in service provision yet give overall positive ratings

“The staff that did help had not been informed by Passenger Assist to help. However, I think you will have concluded that they did an excellent job on the day....”
MI

“Everything [was] great except [I] wasn't met off the train” MI

“I was put on the wrong train and ended up at [the] incorrect station” VI

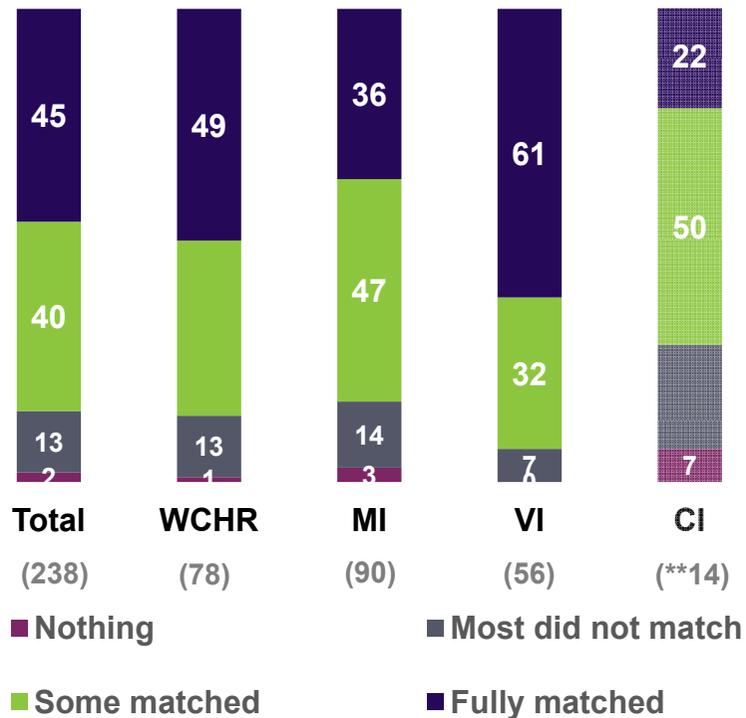
“They need to talk to each other. If you are a wheelchair user you can't always get to the toilet or buffet because of accessibility” WCHR



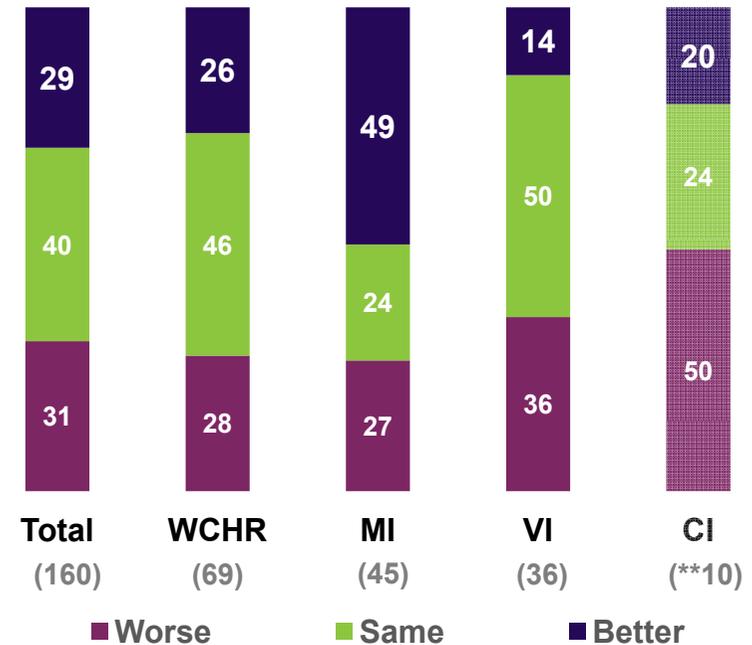
Perceptions of journey

On the whole, fewer than half of passengers receive the exact service they have booked for

Accuracy of booking and service provision



Comparison with last PA booked journey



Q10.2/19.2 How well did the assistance provided during your outward journey match what you had been advised by Passenger Assist?

Base: All journeys **Denotes very low base

Q10.5/19.5 How did this journey compare with your previous experience of using Passenger Assist?

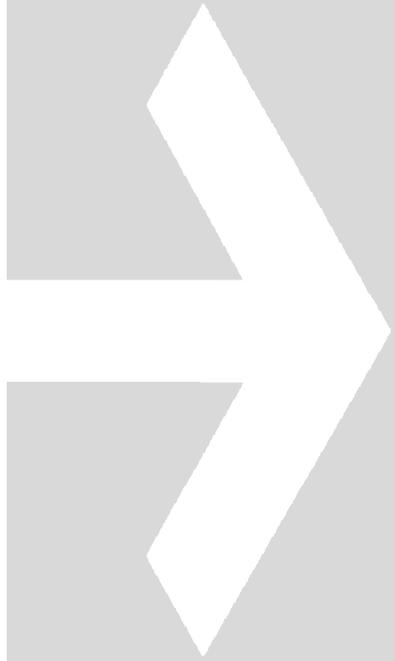
Base: All who have used PA before **Denotes very low base



Findings in numbers

The booking process offers a good experience; but it needs to feed through to service consistency

Booking	99%	of calls either transferred to PA or correct number provided by NRE
	99%	of contacts with NRE were polite
	91%	of NRE call handlers explained the process
	87%	of experiences considered pretty good or excellent
	82%	of callers were advised to arrive at the station early
	78%	of callers were advised to tell a member of staff when they arrived
	72%/71%	of callers were asked about how they would get to and from the station respectively
	45%	were told a meeting point
	33%	did not receive confirmation of their booking
	19%	did not recognise that they had been given a booking reference
Station	30%	of those with a meeting point were not met as agreed
	26%	of passengers felt staff were not prepared for their arrival
Boarding	88%	rated staff assisting them with boarding as pretty good or excellent
	9%	of passengers were not assisted to board the train
On-board	49%	rated on-board staff as pretty good or excellent
	19%	of announcements were either unclear/inaudible or not made
Alighting	21%	of arriving passengers were not assisted by staff to alight from the train
	2 journeys	the passengers were left aboard the train and taken off at a later station
Overall	75%	of journeys considered very or fairly satisfactory



Passenger Focus conclusions and recommendations

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Conclusions

The purpose of this research is to understand the passenger's experience of using the new PA system and compare the findings to the research we carried out in 2010, when we made recommendations for improvements. Some of those recommendations have been implemented by the industry, at least in part. More passengers are being advised to arrive at the station early, are being given booking reference numbers and told where to meet staff. This is a useful starting point, but greater consistency would offer greater passenger benefits.

In this research we found that the booking process offers a good experience; but it also needs to feed through to a better service consistency for passengers.

Satisfaction with the booking process has moved from 83 per cent in 2010 to 87 per cent in 2013. The overall experience of using the PA service has also risen slightly to 75 per cent in 2013 from 71 percent in 2010. This shows little improvement in passenger satisfaction from 2010, before the new booking system was introduced. Passengers who require assistance to travel are guaranteed access to rail services by law. They also generally book assistance at least 24 hours in advance. The industry needs to undertake further work to ensure that far greater numbers of disabled passengers receive the full assistance they book.

The research points to good practice, and also to areas where the industry might usefully focus attention to drive improvements. These points are outlined below. The need for improved communication and staff training remains high.



Conclusions

Booking system

- ➔ NRE is effectively directing passengers to TOCs, but sometimes at a greater cost for the caller than if they redial. TOCs normally offer a cheaper call rate than NRE.
- ➔ TOC staff are generally perceived as professional, friendly and helpful. However, passengers are not always given the most complete or helpful information at the time of booking, such as, booking reference numbers and where at the station to meet staff.
- ➔ PA did not book seats (where reservations are available) or wheelchair spaces in a consistent manner or ask for information on ramp requirements, even to passengers with mobility impairments.
- ➔ There is a lack of uniformity in service delivery - passengers get different information even from same TOC.



Conclusions

The journey

- Passengers' assistance requirements are not always reaching station and on-train staff.
- Passengers are not consistently provided with assistance to board and/or alight from trains for booked journeys.
- Some passengers are confused about key information, such as, where to meet staff and who will provide assistance.
- TOCs have different trains and reservation systems, so passengers need greater clarity about whether priority seats and wheelchair spaces are available.



Passenger Focus recommendations

The research shows that PA is providing a positive service for many passengers. It also indicates where further improvements are likely to improve reliability and enhance the passenger experience. The areas for investigation and improvement are below.

Booking

- ➔ Passengers would benefit from information provided at the booking stage being standardised both within and across TOCs. For example:
 - what assistance to expect at the station and on the train
 - whether there is a meeting point or where a member of staff will meet them. Each station should have at least one recognised meeting point: e.g. the ticket office or barrier at smaller stations. This may assist those who find it difficult to locate a member of staff unaided
 - information about where to sit if a seat cannot be reserved for them. This will only be possible if the industry agrees how to manage the situation, such as, how staff at boarding stations advise staff at interchange and destination stations where in the train the passenger needing assistance is located.
 - information about on-board facilities and availability of staff assistance as promised in the operator's Disabled People's Protection Policy
 - what to do and who to contact if assistance fails.



Passenger Focus recommendations

- Passengers would benefit from being given a reference number at the time of booking. Offering text confirmation stating the assistance to be provided for the journey would be helpful for some. For others, email confirmation has proved useful. It would improve the passenger experience if everyone booking assistance received confirmation in the form most useful to them. This is especially true in the case of mobility-impaired passengers who are not consistently asked if they require a ramp. Upon receipt of confirmation passengers can check if the details are correct and, if not, can amend them with the TOC.
- It appears that information is not always being stored on the system, or if it is, staff are not using it consistently. It is important that information is routinely stored and used for booking to avoid passengers having to repeat details, such as the type of assistance required.

The journey

- Some passengers are still not receiving booked assistance, for example being assisted to board and alight. A failure rate of 21 per cent in our research for alighting equates to a lot of passengers each year. This figure must be reduced. One option could be for the industry to set targets for reducing failure to deliver assistance as booked. As a starting point, we recommend that the industry audit reported failures and identify where the process failed. Some TOCs already undertake work in this area but a nationally-agreed approach would provide TOC managers with information to produce continuous process improvements.



Passenger Focus recommendations

- Some staff, in some cases, are still not receiving information about passengers who have booked assistance. Why? Again, the industry must audit cases where the system has failed to deliver for passengers.
- Further training on identifying and assisting passengers with hidden disabilities is likely to improve service to this group. This research shows noticeably poorer outcomes for passengers with mobility and cognitive disabilities.
- Staff on the train need to take a greater interest in disabled passengers. On many of these journeys not only were tickets not checked, but staff either passed through without even acknowledging the disabled passenger's presence, or did not pass through the train at all. Passengers can feel reassured when their booking and their needs are acknowledged and met by staff on trains. This is especially relevant in times of disruption to journeys. It is not clear from the research whether staff on the train are consistently provided information about passengers who have booked assistance. This is an area that the industry might focus on to improve passenger satisfaction.



Passenger Focus recommendations

- ➔ Further consideration of the following operational issues is likely to lead to improved services to passengers.
 - Advising staff at the destination station where a passenger is sitting on the train. Currently this is inconsistent.
 - Ensuring that staff assist passengers to the train they are booked on. If staff put passengers on a different train they must advise those providing assistance at the next stage.
 - On-board staff are likely to benefit from having a copy of the booking details. This would help them offer a more consistent service.
 - Improvements are required to the way passengers are kept informed when disruption occurs as many will not be able to access information via screens or audio announcements. Passengers' needs in this regard might be usefully ascertained during the booking process.

Our research shows that staff are often delivering an excellent service. However, it still lacks consistency. From the booking stage onwards passengers receive varied service levels. Consistency in the information and services provided by those delivering passenger assistance is the key to promoting confidence in the service. Where all else fails, passengers need a back-up plan, a helpline or a way to access help. The industry needs to ensure that this is available and thereby increase the confidence passengers have when they travel.



Passenger Focus recommendations

After the journey

Train companies should commit to undertake PA satisfaction audits and to collect data to show how many booking requests are met in full. This service is not always easy to deliver in a rail environment, and there can be concerns that such measures may lead to greater criticism of operators. However, greater transparency can lead to greater understanding and opens the door to improving services.

Looking ahead

Many of these recommendations can be addressed by existing operators. However, some, such as the audit and transparency mechanisms set out above, should form an integral part of new franchise agreements when new contracts are agreed with operators. Building on the foundations of the current service and building in continuous process improvement is the challenge to the industry.