

South Western franchise

Qualitative research

December 2015



Produced for:

transportfocus 

Prepared by: 
 Andy Firman
 Research Director

Checked by: 
 Jodie Knight
 Senior Consultant

Approved by: 
 Jo Christensen
 Regional Director

South Western franchise – Draft final report

Rev No	Comments	Checked by	Approved by	Date
1	Draft report	JK	JC	23/10/15
2				
3	Including revisions from TF	AF	AF	14/11/15
4	Including further revisions from TF	AF	AF	20/11/15
5	Including further revisions from TF	AF	AF	9/12/15

Publication version finalised by Transport Focus

Telephone: 020 8639 3560 Website: <http://www.aecom.com>

Job No 60444476

Reference South Western franchise

Date Created November 2015

This document has been prepared by AECOM Limited for the sole use of and publication by Transport Focus and in accordance with generally accepted consultancy principles, the budget for fees and the terms of reference agreed between AECOM Limited and Transport Focus. Any information provided by third parties and referred to herein has not been checked or verified by AECOM Limited, unless otherwise expressly stated in the document. No third party may rely upon this document without the prior and express written agreement of AECOM Limited.

Table of Contents

1	Background, research objectives and methodology	2
1.1	Background	2
1.2	Objectives	2
1.3	Research approach	3
2	Pre-journey	5
2.1	Journey planning	5
2.2	Car parking	6
2.3	Cycling to stations.....	7
3	Tickets and fares	8
3.1	Ticket purchase	8
3.2	Fares	9
3.3	Season tickets	10
3.4	Value for money.....	11
4	Stations	13
4.1	Overview.....	13
4.2	Facilities.....	14
4.3	Environment	14
4.4	Waterloo	15
4.5	Interchanges.....	15
5	Trains	17
5.1	Rolling stock	17
5.2	Facilities.....	17
5.3	Journey enhancements	18
5.4	Seating	20
5.5	Standing	21
6	Performance	23
6.1	Frequency.....	23
6.2	Reliability	24
6.3	Journey times	24
6.4	Disruption - information.....	25
6.5	Disruption - specifics.....	26
7	Staff	28
7.1	Experiences.....	28
7.2	What passengers value	28
7.3	Customer service.....	29
8	Island Line	31
8.1	Service provision	31
8.2	Views on new franchise	32
9	Franchise issues	33
9.1	SWT / Stagecoach.....	33
9.2	Awareness of re-franchising	33
10	Disability issues	35
10.1	Case study 1: Mobility impaired passenger	35
10.2	Case study 2: Mobility impaired passenger	35
10.3	Case study 3: Wheelchair user	36

10.4	Case study 4: Vision impaired passenger.....	36
10.5	Case study 5: Vision impaired passenger.....	37
10.6	Case study 6: Hearing impaired passenger.....	38
11	Conclusions.....	39
11.1	Passenger experience.....	39
11.2	Current strengths: to maintain.....	41
11.3	Improvement areas: to build upon.....	41
	Appendices.....	42

1 Background, research objectives and methodology

1.1 Background

Transport Focus wished to undertake research to generate and reflect passengers' needs for a new South Western franchise. The research findings will feed into the Department for Transport (DfT) consultation process and will ultimately also be made available to prospective bidders for the new franchise.

1.2 Objectives

Qualitative research was carried out in September and October 2015 to understand what passengers want from the new franchise and to meet the following objectives:

- To understand information requirements in relation to journey planning, especially in terms of information sources used to inform decision making to ensure the correct ticket and best fare is obtained for each journey
- To assess passenger views on station access including modal integration and interchange issues and the extent to which facilities are felt to meet needs at different types of stations
- To explore passenger perceptions of trains including facilities available, comfort of seats (and the ability to get one) and the extent to which trains allow passengers to do what they want to do on journeys
- To evaluate perceptions of service frequency and reliability
- To understand experiences of service disruption and the way in which information requirements differ according to journey purpose and the nature of the disruption
- To assess the role and perceptions of staff
- To understand any specific issues affecting travellers with disabilities.

1.3 Research approach

The qualitative research consisted of:

- Fourteen 2-hour focus groups with current rail users, comprised of regular users (commuters) and business or leisure users
- Six individual depth interviews with disabled rail users, comprising passengers with a mix of sight, hearing and mobility impairments.

The sample covered a mix of gender, age and social grade, peak and off-peak users, full and part-time commuters and those travelling on different days of the week and at various times of the day.

The composition of the focus groups and depth interviews is shown below in Tables 2.1 and 2.2.

Table 1.1 Focus group composition

Location	Journey type	Age
London	Commute inside M25	Under 40
London	Business	Mixed
London	Commute outside M25	Under 40
London	Commute inside M25	Over 40
London	Commute outside M25	Over 40
London	Off-peak commuters	Core 25-55
Bournemouth	Leisure	Over 50
Bournemouth	Commute / Leisure	Under 45
Salisbury	Commute	Core 25-55
Salisbury	Leisure	Under 50
Guildford	Commute	Core 25-55
Guildford	Leisure	Over 50
Guildford	Business	Mixed
Isle of Wight	Commute / Leisure	Mixed

Table 1.2 Depth interview composition

Location	Disability	Journey type	Gender
Surrey	Mobility impaired	Leisure	Female
Wiltshire	Mobility impaired	Leisure	Male
Surrey	Wheelchair user	Leisure	Female
Southwest London	Vision impaired	Leisure/Business	Male
Wiltshire	Vision impaired	Business	Male
Southwest London	Hearing impaired	Commute	Female

The research was conducted in the locations stated above, rather than these being the areas in which respondents live. These locations appear in the attributions for the quotes used in the report although passenger experiences will relate to various places across the network.

2 Pre-journey

2.1 Journey planning

The extent to which journey planning occurs prior to journeys being made depends on passenger type.

Commuters often feel there is no need for any type of 'formal' journey planning due to high levels of familiarity and confidence based on habits that become entrenched over a period of time. On reflection, some acknowledge they have low level needs that are likely to be met by checking a website or app prior to leaving home or work to ensure their train is on time.

Leisure and business users are more likely to engage in a wider range of journey planning activities, especially in the event of making a journey that is unfamiliar to them. The vast majority conduct these activities online. Many are aware of specific industry websites they prefer to use and others will conduct a Google search in order to find the information they require.

At the most fundamental level, this will tend to focus on timetable information in order to establish the times of trains, the frequency of trains, whether an interchange is required and the length of the journey (in terms of time taken to complete it). This information is used as the basis of decision making in relation to modal choice to determine whether the train or an alternative mode is likely to be the optimal method. Some will use websites for more detailed elements of journey planning, such as fare and ticket information, and may also purchase tickets online if they are confident in their ability to make appropriate decisions.

In other instances, passengers may prefer to visit a ticket office, either in advance of the journey or on the day of travel. In such cases, most are looking for the reassurance provided by speaking to a member of staff who is able to explain route options that may not be immediately apparent online to an unfamiliar user and to ensure the correct ticket and best value for money fare for the journey is obtained.

Only a small minority in this sample have experience of using the phone for journey planning purposes which tends to be related to specific circumstances or particular needs.

“I always ring the same number which has a disabled option which means I can plan the whole journey from home on all modes of transport. It’s a very good service and I can’t fault it in any way” [Vision impaired, Southwest London]

Responses to the websites and apps most frequently mentioned can be summarised as follows:

The Trainline

This appears to be the default information source for many passengers based on previous positive usage experiences. The website and app are considered to be easy to use with an intuitive and user-friendly interface. The facility to display platform numbers is highly valued among regular and infrequent travellers alike and experiences indicate this information is usually accurate, except in the event of unforeseen circumstances. One or two claimed to be less inclined to purchase tickets through this site due to perceptions (rather than knowledge) that a booking fee is charged.

“The Trainline is an amazing app, it tells you if the train is late and what platform the train will be on which is really helpful at a station like Waterloo. If the train is delayed it tells you where to change to make the journey faster” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

“I use The Trainline rather than the South West Trains website but I must admit I’m a bit confused if it’s any cheaper with one or the other or if there’s any other benefit” [Commuter/Leisure, Bournemouth]

National Rail / National Rail Enquiries

In spite of being a familiar and widely used facility, there is some confusion regarding what the website is called and who operates it. This confusion also applies to the process of purchasing tickets. The website is occasionally regarded as being less user-friendly than The Trainline due to the need to transition to a Train Operating Company (TOC) website to complete the ticket purchase. The absence of a booking fee is expected by users and is therefore not seen as a positive feature of the site (but highlights this disadvantage of The Trainline).

“I just check the train times on the National Rail app every time I make a journey really, to see if it’s delayed or not” [Commuter, outside M25 40+]

South West Trains

There was minimal evidence of this site being used across the sample. Few claimed to consider using it for journey planning purposes, especially if they are habitual users of The Trainline or NRE. The site is claimed (or expected) to be focused on providing company or network specific information rather than being a dedicated journey planning facility and therefore less likely to be able to ‘compete’ on the same basis as the sites mentioned above that specialise in this area.

“I use the National Rail site because I might need to use the tube when I get to London and it will plan the whole journey but South West only does the trains” [Commuter, Off-peak]

“The interface isn’t as easy to use as the National Rail one. That may be due to me being used to the National Rail one but I didn’t find it as intuitive” [Commuter, Guildford]

“It seems really antiquated in the way you use it and aesthetically as well. It just seemed to be a little bit more cumbersome. Also, it doesn’t tell you how to connect; it only concentrates on one dimension” [Commuter, off-peak]

2.2 Car parking

In discussion about station access, there was minimal evidence of station car parks being used across this sample. Most prefer to use other means or find it more convenient to walk or take a bus but some claim they would like to drive but consider this to be an unrealistic option.

The majority perceive spaces to be available at their local station should they choose to drive there although there are certain exceptions. In Poole, the car park tends to be used by people using local shops so this provision is often not available for rail passengers. Two respondents with disabilities are not confident about being able to get a disabled space at their local stations based on previous experiences.

“I have to get a taxi to the station because there are only a couple of disabled spaces at Guildford so there might not be one available” [Mobility impaired]

Cost is generally a more relevant barrier than availability of spaces. Station car parking is usually considered to be sufficiently expensive to provide a disincentive for those who may prefer to drive. Most claim to be reluctant to add to the cost of the rail journey in this way, especially commuters and other frequent users. Some therefore get driven by another family member and dropped off at the station in order to have the flexibility of driving and to avoid the cost of parking.

“I work shifts but I always know I will be able to get a parking space in Aldershot car park because there aren’t many people who are prepared to pay £7 a day” [Commuter, Off-peak]

“The price of the car park is so high I can’t afford to pay it so I have to rely on someone giving me a lift and it drives me insane” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

“It’s not difficult for me to park at all because the station car park is always only half full but it’s just too expensive” [Commuter, Guildford]

“I usually have to park in the stadium because there’s never any spaces at the station and it’s quite reasonable, in fact I think it’s cheaper than the station car park” [Leisure, Bournemouth]

Some leisure users claim to be more inclined to pay the ‘premium’ associated with parking at a station. This may be on the basis of it being a less frequent expense or perceived as a small additional element in the overall cost of a leisure journey (such as a trip to London for shopping or going to the theatre). Business users are also less sensitive to the cost of station parking when this can be re-claimed as an expense.

A further disincentive is the difficulty of obtaining a parking permit reported by a few with experience of using station car parks. This may be for a number of reasons:

- The location of a single machine in relation to some of the parking spaces
- The machine being out of order and needing to buy a permit from the ticket office (and risk missing a train)
- Having insufficient change to buy a permit from the machine
- Being unable to buy a combined rail and parking ticket online.

“You can get a space at Fleet because they have just expanded the car park but it can take 20 minutes to get a ticket from the machine so you may as well have walked to the station which is stupid” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

“At Aldershot the ticket machines in the car park are never in use so you run to the machine and it keeps spitting the money out then you have to run to the ticket office then back to your car to put the ticket in, it’s just ridiculous. So if I’m going from Aldershot I’d rather get a taxi” [Business, Guildford]

2.3 Cycling to stations

Few in this sample are interested in cycling to their local station, although some claim to have noticed recent improvements to the facilities available. Worcester Park, Fleet and Norbiton are among stations mentioned in this respect.

“There is a covered bit inside the station for bikes with a key card so it’s more convenient for me to cycle than to drive” [Commuter, inside M25 U40]

“There is cycle parking at Salisbury and it is okay, but most of the options are quite far away from where you will be catching the train and not on the platform where you need to be. You feel like you are wasting more time before continuing your journey. There is a closer one that is more secure and you have to pay to be able to park your bike there” [Commuter, Salisbury]

Some are aware of cycling being promoted in the recent past, especially in the London area and assume improvements in station facilities to be linked to this initiative. Many understand the theoretical benefits of cycling but consider it to be an impractical option in most circumstances. Others claim cycling to be a seasonal opportunity at best.

Security concerns represent a further disincentive for those who may otherwise be prepared to consider cycling. Some are aware of thefts from their local station and others perceive this is likely to be a problem.

“There must be some trouble at Strawberry Hill because people put notices up saying their bike was stolen which isn’t a great advert. They have CCTV but bikes seem to go missing” [Business, London]

“At Stoneleigh people chain their bikes to a fence and I did cycle once and someone chained their bike to mine. It’s also not secure so if you had an expensive bike you’d be reluctant to leave it there” [Commuter, inside M25 U40]

“There are a lot of cycle rails at Reading but I don’t feel confident enough to leave my bike there because it might get stolen” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

3 Tickets and fares

3.1 Ticket purchase

The process of purchasing tickets was often identified as a source of frustration among all user groups. Issues specific to each of the passenger types can be summarised as follows:

Commuters

Each group was recruited to contain a mix of those using annual, monthly and weekly tickets so a mix of renewal patterns and frequencies were represented across the commuter sample. Renewal was identified as a potential stress point for commuters. Many weekly pass users often need to renew on Monday when queues at ticket offices are likely to be longest. Those renewing monthly passes tend to do so on the morning after their current ticket expires. The difficulties associated with renewing period passes at these times could be alleviated by visiting the ticket office at a quieter time but this seems to be regarded as an equal or greater inconvenience.

Most are unaware of whether their pass could be renewed at a Ticket Vending Machine (TVM) rather than at the ticket office. Some are reluctant to experiment with what is often anticipated to be a complex transaction and others assume this will not be possible due to the need for the ticket to correspond with their photocard.

“If I was organised enough I might be able to order it online and go to the station and use the machine and tap in a few codes” [Commuter, Guildford]

The common feeling therefore is that the renewal process is unnecessarily cumbersome and that a more convenient and streamlined online alternative would be welcomed.

“It’s far too difficult to renew my weekly ticket. The train company seems to have been slow to embrace the technology to make it work. They are good at taking the money but not good at making it straightforward for me” [Commuter, Guildford]

Leisure and Business users

Those who make journeys by train less frequently are more likely to require the assistance of staff. This may be due to the need for advice regarding services such as timetable or route information or to obtain reassurances regarding ticket validity and to ensure the correct ticket is obtained.

“I trust the person behind the desk to give me the right answers and the cheapest fare but if I used the machine it would be down to me” [Business, London]

“I’ve travelled from here to Poole to use the ticket office because they’re so helpful at telling you how to do a difficult journey and what would be the best price” [Leisure, Bournemouth]

“I was being a dithery old person and I wasn’t sure the machine would be able to deal with my Railcard and it didn’t seem to be able to give me the information so I went to the ticket office” [Leisure, Guildford]

The need for interaction with staff can be a problem at certain stations or at certain times. From experience, some are aware that smaller stations may not be staffed at all times but infrequent travellers are less likely to know when staff will be available. Those who often make repeat journeys may be happy to buy their ticket from a TVM but most travelling infrequently or making unfamiliar journeys usually lack the confidence to do so. Some have experience of buying tickets online, including those who are aware of the financial benefits of Advance fares. In these situations, most are happy to use the Ticket On Departure function of TVMs although a few claim this to feel odd after buying the ticket online.

“I think buying online to collect the ticket seems to be a young person’s activity” [Leisure, Guildford]

Some believe the difficulties associated with purchasing tickets prior to travel would be reduced by being able to buy them on the train. However, most are concerned about the possibility of incurring a penalty fare and are therefore prepared to tolerate the inconveniences of obtaining a ticket in order to avoid this happening.

A further theme that emerged consistently throughout the research is a high level of passenger interest in replacing paper tickets with a more durable alternative. Those with experience of using Oyster especially feel there may also be an opportunity for the current range of products to be replaced with a more modern smartcard.

“My annual season ticket is a paper card which is massively antiquated because you have to get it changed if it goes in the washing machine or if it is next to your debit card for too long and I’ve lost my card twice and it’s a real pain to get it replaced” [Commuter, off-peak]

“They should have tickets you can print at home or e-tickets. You should be able to buy the ticket on your phone then just show it as proof of purchase” [Commuter/Leisure, Bournemouth]

3.2 Fares

During the course of the research, it became apparent that passenger views on the fares they pay for journeys are often based on inaccurate perceptions rather than knowledge of the fare structure.

Awareness of options available tends to be restricted rather than comprehensive. The tendency can be to assume tickets used for journeys made in the past will also be most suitable in the future. This is partly because the fare structure can be difficult to understand and navigate, especially for those who are less frequent travellers. It is also partly due to habit developed over long periods of time which means that repeat purchase can be regarded as the line of least resistance. Both situations can make passengers reluctant to challenge decision making processes when it comes to buying tickets.

“If you go to London to the theatre in the evening you know you will return after rush hour but if you go to a matinee you need to know if you will need a more expensive ticket because you might be coming back around the busy time at 6pm” [Leisure, Guildford]

Many are therefore uncertain about how to ensure they pay the cheapest fare and obtain the best value for journeys made. The main barrier to achieving this for some is either that they have no knowledge or very outdated knowledge of the fare structure. Others however are sufficiently aware of the options available to know that good value can be obtained if it is possible to book tickets in advance of the date of travel (but not always necessarily understood to be an Advance fare).

“If I have a meeting somewhere I can’t use an Oyster card I have to buy a ticket but I’m never convinced I have bought the right ticket” [Business, London]

“I’ve never asked if there is a better ticket for me to use so maybe I should but I don’t think there would be so I just buy the same ticket from the machine every time” [Leisure, Guildford]

“I travel to Torquay often and go online to choose the cheapest tickets that tend to be mid-week and later in the day and if you’re prepared to go on a slower one rather than a direct one it works out cheaper that way” [Leisure, Bournemouth]

“I think you can only buy single tickets now and you can book them up to 12 weeks in advance and the further in advance you buy them the cheaper they are” [Commuter/Leisure, Bournemouth]

“I think there are a lot of tickets, but sometimes you don’t really know what a lot of the fares are as there are so many of them. You can go in small groups or pairs and different websites offer different discounts. You always feel like there may have been a better way to do it, or find a cheaper option but you are not quite sure” [Leisure, Salisbury]

“I feel like the prices are random, you can go a short distance and pay a lot of money and you can go at a different time and pay less. It is quite hard to understand how they come up with their figures” [Commuter, Salisbury]

The issues highlighted above are more likely to apply to infrequent rail users although there is consistent evidence from this work to suggest that some commuters may lack sufficient understanding of the system to ensure they are always using the best ticket. The picture is influenced further by perceptions of Oyster to a certain extent and occasionally complicated by the Oyster boundary. Many who live or work within the Oyster boundary have internalised communications received about Oyster always being the cheapest way to travel in London. This seems to have created some confusion in the minds of a few commuters especially (who are unaware of the difference between Oyster Pay As You Go and storing a period pass on Oyster, for example).

“I pay as I go on my Oyster because there is a daily cap so I just stick £60 on it for the week and I don’t have to worry about it” [Commuter, inside M25 U40]

3.3 Season tickets

As explained, commuters were recruited to ensure a mix of ticket types used was represented across the sample. The majority were therefore using weekly or monthly passes rather than annual season tickets. During discussion around this issue it became clear that most of those not using an annual ticket have not looked into the option seriously. There are a number of explanations for this:

- There is minimal awareness of the way in which the cost of an annual ticket is calculated and the extent of the financial benefit of it compared to buying weekly or monthly tickets. Commuters are therefore surprised to learn from others or the moderator that an annual pass effectively amounts to 12 weeks of free travel each year.
- There is almost no understanding of other financial advantages such as discounts available for other journeys made or the automatic compensation calculation and reduction applied on renewal.

“When you go for another one they do the working out at the end so you get your money back pretty much straight away” [Commuter, off-peak]

- This is occasionally compounded by misunderstandings about the advantages of the annual ticket being loaded in favour of the TOC rather than the passenger.

“I get six weeks holiday so I would be paying for my travel during my annual leave. The other thing is you get charged for seven days and I only work five days a week” [Commuter, Guildford]

- One of the off-peak commuters and a small number of others with an irregular or part-time commute mentioned that they would be less likely to get the full benefit of an annual season ticket compared to other commuters.
- Some are aware of the benefits of an annual pass but do not have the funds available to make the initial outlay required if their employer does not offer a loan scheme. Some would be prepared to make repayments on a monthly basis if such a scheme was offered by the TOC.

“It’s expensive for me, because my work don’t do a season ticket loan so I can’t afford £2,000 or £3,000, whatever it is” [Commuter, inside M25 40+]

- Some are aware of the benefits of an annual pass but are reluctant to make an annual commitment if there is any uncertainty about the security of their job or if there is any possibility of changing jobs in the next year.

“My work does a loan thing but every week I feel like I want to leave my job then I change my mind so I think it works out cheaper but I never get round to doing it” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

- Some are concerned about whether penalties would apply in the event of attempting to get a refund on an unused portion of an annual ticket and a small number reported bad experiences of this in the past, although not necessarily from South West Trains (see section 7.3).

“I couldn’t get an annual tube ticket refunded so I wouldn’t do it again even to save money, it was a nightmare” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

- A small minority are concerned about losing an annual pass, either in terms of whether the value of it would be protected through registration or in terms of the anticipated hassle involved in getting a replacement.

The issues outlined above suggest there is likely to be a role for the TOC to play in communicating the benefits of annual season tickets more clearly to passengers as a possible route to helping enhance overall value for money perceptions.

3.4 Value for money

Across the sample, views on fares were relatively consistent but attitudes towards value for money tend to be more variable.

Data from the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) shows satisfaction with value for money across the network to be at 35%. It is therefore not surprising to hear on this occasion that passengers believe the fares they pay to be too high. What is perhaps more surprising is that there is no real difference in this respect between peak and off-peak users. These concerns are compounded by high awareness of annual fare increases. Many feel resentful that fares increase every January and at a faster rate than the salaries of the majority over recent years.

“What bothers me most about the fares is that they go up every year but I haven’t had a pay rise for ages and there is no change to the service” [Commuter, inside M25 40+]

“The fares go up even though the trains are the same and you don’t get any better service” [Commuter, inside M25 U40]

“It doesn’t take account of the recession. Petrol fluctuates with the market rate so other modes of transport change accordingly but the railways don’t” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

“It annoys me when they put the fares up every year but our wages don’t go up and they don’t improve the service, don’t put on extra trains and don’t guarantee you will get a seat” [Business, Guildford]

Commuters are aware that they are more likely to pay the highest fares most of the time. These views tend not to be softened by season tickets that have the effect of making each journey cheaper. They are also likely to have the least positive perceptions of value for money since their views are affected by issues such as overcrowding, the inability to get a seat and the fact that services at peak times are more likely to be subject to disruption.

Value for money is often regarded more positively among those who have more choice about when they travel and are able to benefit from off-peak and Advance fares. Those making off-peak journeys may still consider fares to be high but the off-peak journey experience will usually exert a more positive impact on their overall value for money perceptions. This effect is amplified for those who use Advance fares, even though there is evidence to suggest that limited knowledge and awareness of them means many are not deriving maximum value for money from journeys made.

“I always travel off-peak, whether it’s at the weekend or after 9.30 so it’s always cheaper and the trains are less crowded” [Leisure, Guildford]

Naturally there are numerous variables that will influence perceptions of the value equation and these will change according to the specific circumstances of each journey undertaken. However, two issues are consistently identified that contribute to positive attitudes around value for money:

The active choice of rail over other modes. Although some claim to be part of a captive market and to have no choice other than to travel by SWT, in reality many acknowledge journeys made by rail across the network to be preferable and often cheaper than the alternatives available. This tends to be especially true for those who travel into London.

“You can work out the best deal, when is the best time to go and come back and you can read a book or go to sleep if you want, it’s more relaxing than being in traffic” [Leisure, Bournemouth]

“I’m delighted with the group travel thing and I’m delighted with my OAP card and I can travel at reasonable times so I think it’s very fair. It would cost me a lot more to take my car and park” [Leisure, Guildford]

“Sometimes it’s cheaper to take the train and it’s certainly faster and you don’t have traffic or road works or accidents and you don’t have to look for somewhere to park and pay for that and the congestion charge” [Commuter, Guildford]

“I’ve chosen to live outside London so my house price will be less and my mortgage is lower so I understand why my journey will cost more” [Commuter, off-peak]

“It’s a no-brainer to get the train unless they start to get carried away with their fares but if you are lucky enough to be able to travel off-peak it’s not too painful” [Business, London]

The influence of important attributes of the current franchise, especially in relation to the rolling stock and critical aspects of performance that are often felt to have improved in the recent past. These issues are discussed in detail in sections 6 and 8 of this report.

4 Stations

4.1 Overview

Each of the focus groups were recruited to ensure a good range of stations were represented across the sample. The relatively large sample size means that a number of stations across the network are therefore represented in the following section, but obviously not all of them. Some of the views expressed may be based on the experiences of a small number of passengers rather than being representative of the large number of passengers using these stations on a daily basis.

Passenger attitudes towards stations are understandably mixed. Responses are determined by a number of variables such as station size and circumstantial factors such as the nature of journeys made. Passenger needs will therefore be influenced by a range of issues and will depend on how the station is used in the context of the journey (not at all, to buy a ticket, to wait for a train etc.). Across the range of usage situations and experiences, it is possible to identify a basic hierarchy of passenger needs from stations:

- Information about service provision is a 'hygiene factor' in that it is a fundamental requirement that would be expected by all passengers. Information provision is taken for granted and would be seriously detrimental to journey experiences if not available.

***“There should be information systems in real time, the more information the better really”
[Commuter/Leisure, Bournemouth]***

- Personal security is also a hygiene factor and is addressed in the section on station security below.
- Availability of facilities such as shelter, toilets and refreshments can be regarded as 'critical success' factors. These are not necessarily expected to be provided at every station and passengers understand why they will not be in certain circumstances. However, if the facility is needed by a passenger and is not available, this will have a negative impact on overall perceptions of the success of the journey experience.

“Stoneleigh has got no refreshment place, limited cover and the waiting room is invariably locked but it doesn't bother me much because there are four trains an hour so I never have to wait there longer than 15 minutes” [Leisure, Guildford]

- It may be possible to exceed expectations of some passengers via the provision of facilities such as free wi-fi. This is due to the fact that free wi-fi is known to be widely available in other contexts but tends not to be associated with trains and train stations. It is therefore possible that this could be a 'quick win' for the TOC that would have a disproportionately positive impact on passenger perceptions of stations across the network.

Some passengers have pragmatic views of stations and recognise that many are Victorian buildings which impacts on their functionality and attitudes towards them. Many stations are therefore felt to be in need of attention or modernisation (and it is acknowledged that some stations have recently been improved).

“All the stations I can think of are ghastly 150 year old buildings. The platforms are concrete and the walls are concrete and there's no effort made anywhere to make you feel comfortable” [Business, Guildford]

Reactions to stations across the network understandably vary according to size and type. A number of consistent themes emerged in terms of how passengers evaluate stations and these have been summarised in the following sections.

Some station specific details have also been provided as an appendix.

4.2 Facilities

A number of specific station examples are outlined below based on personal experiences expressed by passengers during the research.

Good facilities

Fleet – good example of a new station with modern facilities.

Salisbury – refurbished and facilities have been improved.

Southampton – has also benefitted from recent refurbishment.

Reading – benefits from considerable recent investment in the infrastructure.

Wimbledon – a busy station with everything needed by users.

Whitton – has recently had the toilet facilities upgraded (although it is often locked).

Mortlake – positive views from a small number of users.

Poor facilities

Bournemouth – well-kept but poor facilities for a station of this size.

Poole – not much available when waiting for trains.

Farnham – an old station felt to be in need of modernisation.

Worcester Park – facilities thought to be available at peak times only.

North Camp – nothing expected for a station of this size.

Isle of Wight – all stations are considered to be basic and lacking facilities.

“I think is pretty good really. Although Bournemouth is old it’s sort of nice being old and it’s well-kept and it looks good, it’s just draughty, but I think train stations are like that aren’t they?” [Leisure, Bournemouth]

“Poole is a hub isn’t it, it’s quite a busy station but the facilities are poor” [Leisure, Bournemouth]

“Worcester Park is definitely made for commuting; the shop and the booking office are only open at certain times, mainly rush hour” [Business, London]

“At Farnham there’s only a tiny shelter. Why do the platforms have to be exposed to the elements? We are paying a fortune for our journeys and can’t even stand in the dry waiting for our trains” [Business, Guildford]

4.3 Environment

Feelings about the station environment also produced a somewhat mixed picture but obvious room for improvement was identified in certain areas, especially in relation to station security.

Station security

Surbiton – staff are always visible so passengers tend to feel safe.

Woking – visible staff presence at most times enhances security perceptions.

Hersham / Pokesdown – often unstaffed (at night) and therefore can create security concerns.

Stoneleigh / Branksome – poor lighting can create a scary environment.

Guildford – passengers dislike using the underpass.

Upper Halliford – one resident uses Sunbury instead due to security concerns.

“Stoneleigh has poor lighting and it’s pitch black and both sides of the station are covered in bushes so a young girl travelling would really be on her own” [Commuter, inside M25 U40]

“Poole and Bournemouth are manned and well-lit but places like Branksome and Harmworthy can be off-putting and intimidating” [Commute/Leisure, Bournemouth]

“I use Sunbury but my nearest station is Upper Halliford but it’s a frightening place to be at night when it’s dark because there’s never anyone around and the lighting is appalling” [Commuter, off-peak]

Waiting areas

Hampton Court – felt to be a lovely station to spend time at.

Wimbledon – has a nice waiting room and concourse area.

Poole – plenty of seating available.

Farnham / Aldershot – not enough platform shelter, especially at peak times.

Hampton – limited cover available and no toilets.

Putney – toilets are usually locked.

“Hampton Court is lovely, you can see the palace and there’s a little coffee shop and loos that work and are clean. It’s probably one of the nicest stations I’ve used” [Business, London]

4.4 Waterloo

Responses to Waterloo are positive overall. Passengers acknowledge it has iconic status as the flagship station of the South Western franchise but also recognise it not to be comparable with any other station on the network for this reason.

Waterloo is generally felt to function well as a major London terminal station. The main concourse area is considered to be sufficiently spacious, even to accommodate the high volumes of passengers using the station, including at peak times. This helps to create the impression of it being easy to access all platforms and information relating to services when required. From experience, staff are also known to be readily available to assist with queries.

Furthermore, Waterloo is considered to be a nice environment in which to spend time in the event of needing to wait for a train (perhaps in contrast to certain other major London terminals). In this respect, many users appreciate the wide variety of retail and catering outlets available.

There are two areas in which Waterloo is felt to perform less well. Some claim to try to avoid needing to buy tickets there due to the long queues that are thought to be present at all times both in the ticket office and at TVMs. A few are also critical of the lack of seating at the station and feel that it should not be necessary to have to buy something from one of the shops in order to be able to sit down while waiting for a train.

“Waterloo obviously has lots of facilities but there are only about four seats and after I have been on my feet all day it would be nice to have somewhere to sit while I’m waiting for my train” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

“Waterloo is the worst place to buy a ticket because the queue is always huge at the ticket office and at the machines” [Commuter, off-peak]

4.5 Interchanges

Many passengers identify interchanging as a stress point of their rail journey. The importance placed on successful interchange is equally high among commuters who need to do it regularly and leisure and

business users who travel less frequently and are therefore likely to be less familiar with procedures. The functionality of interchanges on the network therefore has a major impact on the overall journey experience for all users. Accurate platform information is often considered to be critical in order to allay some of these concerns. Many claim apps especially to be invaluable when interchanging since this information can be accessed during the journey and while at the interchange station, if necessary.

Clapham Junction was most frequently discussed in this context for three reasons:

- Many passengers in the sample have experience of using it at some time
- Some are aware of the station's status as the busiest interchange station in the UK
- It tends to elicit strong views among those with experience of using it.

These strong views also tend to be polarised. Frequent users are more likely to claim information provision to be adequate for their needs on the basis that they know where to look for it from experience of using the station. Commuters are also more likely to know from experience which platforms serve particular destinations. Leisure and business users are unlikely to have the same level of knowledge or experience and therefore rely more heavily on information displays and staff. Although it is assumed large numbers of staff are employed at a station of this size, some passengers feel that staff are not always readily available when required. A small minority suggested this may be due to deployment rather than numbers of staff available since staff are occasionally concentrated in the ticket office area rather than on platforms.

“At Clapham Junction staff seem to congregate around the ticket barriers rather than being on the platforms where they would be more useful” [Commuter, inside M25 40+]

Passenger volumes at peak times are of greater overall concern to commuters especially. Some claim this to be a frightening experience at times when it feels as if it might be possible to be swept along with a flow of passengers all moving in the same direction in a confined space. Alternatively, it can feel as though 'gridlock' could occur when there are so many people in the same place that it becomes difficult for anyone to move. The concerns described are more likely to apply to the subway under the platforms than the walkway above them.

“Clapham Junction is the worst. Everybody pours into this small tunnel and at some points it completely freezes and no-one can move” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

“Clapham Junction is packed and you are just fighting and it feels like only the fittest person will get through. It's a nightmare” [Business, London]

Other interchanges frequently used by respondents in this sample are Woking, Wimbledon and Vauxhall. All three are recognised to be smaller and less busy than Clapham Junction but share some of the same characteristics in terms of the way the station is used. Woking and Wimbledon are both felt to perform well as interchanges. Both have adequate information and staff provision and have facilities available for passengers needing to wait for connections. Vauxhall is felt to be less hospitable and lacking basic facilities, including toilets.

5 Trains

5.1 Rolling stock

Passenger views on the rolling stock from this research are positive overall. Some are aware that the fleet has recently been replaced and responses are therefore influenced by this knowledge. Those who have been making journeys on the network for some time have the additional perspective of being able to compare the current rolling stock with the trains it replaced and acknowledge it to be a considerable improvement. Although not always expressed in this way, the new trains are often regarded as a positive example of how investment in the network can deliver a tangible benefit for passengers.

“The trains are beautiful, they really are. They’re a huge improvement on what they used to be, a massive improvement” [Commuter, in M25 40+]

“The trains always seem quite new. We’re quite lucky with South West because I think they are fairly new trains” [Leisure, Bournemouth]

As well as being new, the trains are generally thought to be well maintained. From a passenger perspective, they appear to always be in good condition (although respondents are unclear whether this due to the trains still being new or efforts made by the TOC to ensure the trains are well kept). In either event, the thing that is evident to passengers is that the trains are mostly clean and tidy, although some accept this is not possible to achieve for every journey, given the often high volume of people travelling on the trains.

“The trains seem to get dirty between 3pm and 5pm so if I finish work early there is rubbish on the floor but when it gets to rush hour they always seem to be cleaner” [Commuter, inside M25 U40]

“The trains definitely seem to be cleaned thoroughly. I think it seems as if the seats have had a deep clean” [Commuter, Guildford]

“They pay attention during the day and must clean them quite regularly because the trains are clean if I travel in the afternoon. Last time I came back from Waterloo I couldn’t get on the train because the cleaners were on it and we had to wait for them to finish” [Business, Guildford]

Many have also noticed the difference in terms of the interior layout of trains compared to the old rolling stock. The new trains are considered to be of a contemporary design and create the impression of being spacious and bright. This latter point is occasionally in the comparative context of some passengers making journeys with other TOCs. The trains are also generally acknowledged to be appropriate to the types of journeys being made on them. This is in recognition of the fact that many of the trains need to serve commuter and suburban routes (rather than longer distance journeys relevant to certain InterCity routes, for example).

“I can get First Great Western from Reading to Paddington and it’s always crowded and dark and I don’t enjoy it. But into Waterloo it’s quite a pleasant journey because the seats are nice and they have quiet zones” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

“The trains are quite spacious because they are expecting quite a few standing passengers but if you are lucky enough not to be on a packed train you can spread your legs out” [Business, London]

5.2 Facilities

Facilities provided on trains tend to be evaluated on the basis of issues such as journey purpose and length, rather than perceptions being held at a network-wide level. Views on facilities available on trains therefore relate to needs likely to arise during a specific journey rather than being a reflection of attitudes to SWT in a broader sense. Feelings about storage are more likely to apply to any journey but passengers often recognise that toilets and catering are less likely to be regarded as essential facilities for journeys of less than one hour.

Storage

Passengers generally consider storage provision on SWT trains to be at least adequate. The carriages feel more spacious inside than those of the rolling stock that was replaced and this creates an impression of more room to store larger items when required, such as pushchairs, bikes and suitcases. Some recognise the trade-off between having more seats or more space inside the train and the majority seem to consider that an appropriate balance has been struck.

“The new trains are more spacious. It’s better for people with pushchairs and there seem to be more dedicated areas for people with bikes” [Commuter, Guildford]

One issue consistently identified as being less positive in this respect is overhead storage space above the seats. Some consider this to be too narrow for most passengers to be able to use, especially on busier services. This is felt to be a particular problem since it encourages people to put bags on seats, which is a source of irritation to those looking for somewhere to sit.

Catering

Attitudes to catering across this sample are consistent in that the majority expect nothing and consider it a bonus if anything is provided, primarily since the majority are making journeys of less than 60 minutes with SWT and feel that refreshments are necessary only for longer journeys. If provided, a trolley is considered to meet most needs and the practical limitations of being able to offer this facility on off-peak services only is widely accepted.

Toilets

Passenger attitudes to toilets on SWT trains are polarised, both in terms of provision and usability. It is likely that the lack of many very negative comments in this research is a reflection of generally positive views about the new rolling stock.

Most agree that toilets are unlikely to be necessary for journeys of less than an hour, in the majority of circumstances. However, some recognise that toilets may need to be available in the event of an ‘emergency’ or when making leisure journeys with children, for example.

Experiences of using the toilets are varied and highly personal. Most agree using a toilet on a train is a last resort, or at least to be avoided if possible. If needed however, passengers are likely to put their gratitude above views on issues such as cleanliness of the facility. However, some claim their experiences of using toilets recently to be less bad than in the past and assume this to be linked to the age of the trains.

“They are a bit like pub toilets, sometimes good and sometimes bad” [Business, London]

“I hate them and avoid using them if I can. I’ve had to use them twice and that’s what put me off because both experiences were bad so I think of it as a last resort” [Commuter/Leisure, Bournemouth]

Accessible toilets with a sliding door are preferred to the smaller cubicle style. However, concerns about being able to work out how to close and lock the sliding door tend to outweigh other views in relation to the cleanliness of either type of toilet.

“The one I used had a curvy door. It was more roomy than usual but it wasn’t very well looked after” [Commuter/Leisure, Bournemouth]

5.3 Journey enhancements

Enhancements are different from facilities in that these are features that would make journey time more enjoyable or productive for users. These are usually not considered to be necessary for shorter journeys (less than 45-60 minutes) although problems with the phone signal in some areas increase the perceived need for wi-fi.

Phone signal

There were frequent spontaneous comments in several focus groups about not being able to get a mobile signal when making journeys with SWT. This is a major source of dissatisfaction for many who want or need to make calls while travelling (but welcomed by others who prefer not to listen to the conversations of other passengers). Many claim this to be an acknowledged problem across the SWT network (rather than being a mobile network provider issue). There was frequent talk of 'dead zones' in various places but the route between Farnham and London seems to be particularly badly affected. This is claimed to have a significant negative impact on overall journey quality since it prevents passengers from doing what they would otherwise choose to do on their phones during the 'downtime' spent on the train.

"I often need to call someone who is giving me a lift and I can't because there is a dead zone so there is no way of contacting them, it's horrible" [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

"You come into a station and it starts to download one and a half emails then you move on a lose the signal again" [Business, London]

"The phone reception is awful and what I get upset about is that I can't work on the phone on the train because I can't get the internet. It's inhibiting when you can't do what you want to do and it's ridiculous on a major line going into London" [Business, Guildford]

Wi-fi

The availability of wi-fi as a journey enhancement is related to journey length. Most agree that they can manage without wi-fi for journeys of under an hour but it is more likely to be needed for longer journeys. However, this needs to be considered in the context of not having a phone signal on many journeys. In these situations the need for wi-fi tends to be amplified to the level where it is regarded as essential (in order to have some connection to the outside world). If wi-fi is provided, none would expect to pay to use it, primarily on the basis that access to free wi-fi is becoming an increasingly common element of the offer from service providers in other sectors.

"We need wi-fi on the trains. They have it on buses so why not on trains? You don't get 3G or 4G on the train at all and I don't know why" [Commuter, Salisbury]

"I go to Birmingham a lot and I love those trains because I plug my phone in and get on the wi-fi and it's a nice experience. My ideal train journey would be browsing the internet all the way" [Commuter, inside M25 U40]

"If there was wi-fi you could do the life admin things you don't get time to do during the day. It would make the journey go a lot quicker and be a better use of my time and it would help my work-life balance" [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

"I spend 40 minutes on the train and could get 40 minutes' work done and leave the office 40 minutes earlier" [Commuter, off-peak]

Power sockets

The issues around power sockets are similar to those for wi-fi. The majority of passengers agree they are unlikely to need a power socket for most shorter journeys but this view would be revised in the event of a phone signal or wi-fi being available (in order to be able to charge devices that would then be used more often on the train). Some questioned why power sockets are not provided as a standard feature of new trains, especially since they are widely known to be available when travelling with certain other TOCs. There were frequent mentions of the high-profile media story of someone being arrested for 'stealing' electricity after using a power socket on a London Overground train.

"If I'm using my laptop I could plug it in so it has enough charge for when I get to my meeting so I don't have to ask the client if I can charge it there" [Commuter, Guildford]

***“When I travel I could plug my phone in and have four seats to myself but at peak times it would be an absolute nightmare because everyone would be jumping all over each other to plug their phones in”
[Commuter, off-peak]***

“There was something on the news not very long ago about somebody being fined for using the socket on a train because it was stealing electricity” [Leisure, Bournemouth]

Quiet coaches

The provision of quiet coaches is welcomed by some who miss them when not provided. Those who choose not to use quiet coaches do not object to them being provided for use by other passengers. The main problem with this facility is the lack of respect for it shown by some passengers and the difficulty of enforcing it by staff.

5.4 Seating

All would prefer to be able to get a seat for the journeys they make but, based on experience, not all expect to be able to get one. The inability to get a seat due to overcrowding has a major impact on passengers at a number of levels including negative views of specific journey experience, value for money perceptions and overall views of SWT.

The impact that any of these factors will have is closely related to the extent to which the passenger believes that buying a ticket entitles them to get a seat on a train or only to travel on a train. Those who believe the former are never likely to accept not having the choice to sit when travelling by train but some of those who adopt the latter view have become more sanguine. This is especially true for those with long experience of making a relatively short commute into London (from stations within the M25, for example). Some of these commuters are resigned to the fact they are unlikely to get a seat due to the point in the train's journey at which they board. In these situations, the need to be able to stand safely and comfortably becomes a more important priority than getting a seat. The difficulty for many with this point of view is that even this is often not possible.

***“I don't mind standing because I'm still healthy but there must be a lot of people for whom it's a nightmare”
[Business, London]***

“I can get the train from Worcester Park or the tube from Morden. I prefer to get the train because it's quicker but very often in the morning I get the tube because I just want to sit down” [Commuter, inside M25 U40]

“All I want to do is read my book but if I'm standing there's no way I can read a book. Sometimes you're so cramped you can't even hold a phone to your face” [Business, London]

The majority are positive about the seating configuration on trains and the options this offers to passengers. The removal of the 3+2 format on some trains is especially welcomed for creating more space among those who need to stand and also to create more personal space among those able to get a seat.

“There are no rows of three seats and they are quite clearly delineated as individual seats which is good because it's not like being on those bench seats on buses where there is that awkwardness” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

The comfort of the seats is felt to be good enough for the length of journeys most are making with SWT, although the longitudinal seats are considered to be suitable for short journeys only. Leg space is a more important criterion for most passengers and most of the seats are felt to perform well enough in this respect.

“The rows of seats that face in aren’t very comfortable. They are narrow and too short for your legs but bearable for a short distance. The other seats are okay” [Commuter, Guildford]

“I don’t travel in rush hour but they need to cater for people who do so the seats facing in create more space for standing which would make it a more pleasant experience, I think” [Leisure, Guildford]

Most acknowledge a table is neither expected nor required for the majority of journeys and the fold-down trays on the back of airline-style seats are usually considered to be adequate for short-term needs. However, some like to have the option of seats around a table for longer journeys or when travelling with children or in a small group.

“If you are going to be on the train for more than an hour it’s nice to have a table because you can get some work done prior to your meeting or whatever” [Business, London]

“It excites me if I get a table rather than just looking at the back of someone’s head, I like it. It makes me feel less claustrophobic and less travel sick” [Commuter/Leisure, Bournemouth]

5.5 Standing

The research uncovered mixed views regarding the need to stand for certain journeys that may have important implications for the choice of carriage design used on different routes across the network.

As explained above, London commuters tend to have a specific perspective on this issue. Many (but by no means all) understand the circumstances of needing to travel by train into a major city. These people are more likely to have realistic rather than idealistic views about the likelihood of getting a seat on a train travelling to or from London in peak hours. Some are prepared to reluctantly agree that standing is bearable for short journeys (of up to 20-30 minutes, depending on the individual).

“The price is the wrong way round because some people pay less to get a seat and I pay more for a worse service” [Commuter, inside M25 U40]

Interestingly, those who live outside London or who are more likely to travel outside peak times often expressed the least tolerant views in relation to having to stand. Although this seems counter-intuitive, this may be due to the greater disparity between expectations among these passengers and the reality of the situation they sometimes find themselves in.

“It would be nice to get a seat, especially when you’ve paid in advance. It’s a lot of money to pay to stand but I’ve just given up” [Commuter, Salisbury]

“During the day it’s a Godsend to be able to get a seat but on the way back after meetings I want to be able to put on my laptop but I can’t because I haven’t got a seat” [Business, London]

“The fare might be a problem for other people but it’s not for me, I travel off-peak for comfort and I pay for a seat and I bloody expect to get a seat. I don’t expect to have to stand under somebody’s armpit in mid-summer” [Commuter, off-peak]

“Going west, sometimes from Salisbury there are six carriages going to Exeter but sometimes there are only three on a potentially very busy route and they don’t tell you how many are going to be on it and you can be stood up the whole way” [Commuter, Salisbury]

Many have strong views about first class accommodation (although it is important to note that the sample did not include a quota of first class passengers). Empty first class areas on crowded trains are a source of frustration whenever it is observed. This is especially difficult to understand for passengers who only appreciate the issue from the perspective of their own journey comfort rather than seeing the revenue implications from a TOC point of view.

“Sometimes there is one first class carriage, sometimes there are three. On really busy trains there seem to be a lot of first class carriages that are empty” [Leisure, Salisbury]

“First class really winds me up because there is never anybody in there so they should maybe get rid of the first class carriages” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

“The trains have a first class section which is absurd because I can’t believe anybody actually buys a first class ticket” [Business, London]

“You can see space in first class and you think, ‘well, I’ll alleviate the congestion so other people can get on the train’ and I’ll just stand there, I don’t want to sit there. I’ve been told by the conductor you can’t even stand in the first class and you think ‘look, use some common sense, because people can’t get on the train”’ [Commuter, Salisbury]

6 Performance

6.1 Frequency

Passengers are generally satisfied with the frequency of services they use and responses in this respect therefore tend to be positive overall.

This issue is likely to be of greater concern to commuters than other user types. The evidence from commuters in this sample suggests that the busiest routes are considered to be well served. The majority regard the frequency to be at least acceptable and some acknowledge services to be so frequent that there is no need to use a timetable or aim for a specific train. On certain routes commuters are aware additional services are provided at peak times and welcome this.

“I was really surprised at how frequent trains are from Woking to Waterloo. I’m not very good at time-keeping or going for the same train but sometimes they are about every three minutes” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

In spite of general satisfaction with service frequency, a few exceptions were identified:

- Services on the Shepperton line are either not frequent enough or trains are scheduled too close to each other rather than being spread out at even intervals
- Worcester Park is felt to have too few trains at peak hours for such a busy station
- Services from Brookwood are infrequent and mean that passengers may need to travel from Woking to have more choice (but then need to drive and perhaps incur the additional cost of parking)
- Sunday services are often not frequent enough for commuters who need to work at weekends.

“I have to work every weekend but the trains are every hour so I have to drive and use the underground” [Commuter, off-peak]

“More people get off at Worcester Park than any other station except Clapham Junction so I think there should be more trains from there at all times of the day” [Business, London]

“If you go to London there are probably enough trains but trains going to other places from Salisbury can be less frequent which can be a problem” [Commuter, Salisbury]

However, experiences of overcrowding indicate that additional capacity is required. This rather literal response is unsurprising from passengers seeking a solution to an important problem but who may not appreciate the technical or logistical constraints involved. It can create the impression that service frequency is inadequate, especially among passengers who frequently experience the type of problems highlighted above. Overcrowding and being unable to get a seat are both factors that are known to generate dissatisfaction.

“There’s three carriages on the 7.15 from Gillingham and it’s quite busy, but on the 7.45 it’s two carriages of which half is first class, so it gets to Tisbury and you’ve got all the school kids and nine times out of ten you won’t get a seat” [Commuter, Salisbury]

“There’s absolutely no flexibility but there should be, it’s all about supply and demand and they should be able to adjust to that” [Commuter, London inside M25 40+]

“If you increase the frequency of the services then there would be more seating available” [Commuter, London inside M25 U40]

There is a common feeling that last trains from London on certain routes currently depart too early. This was occasionally evaluated in terms of wanting to be able to go to the theatre in London and to have a drink or a meal afterwards but being unable to do so if needing to travel home by train. With a couple of specific exceptions of shift workers or passengers with unusual commutes, first services in the morning are generally considered to be early enough.

“In the summer season the last train back from Weymouth is 10.30 so if you’re having a good time it would be nice to have a later train around 11.45 when the pubs close” [Commuter/Leisure, Bournemouth]

“The last train to Dorking is 11.15 and I often have to take clients out and have a problem getting home afterwards so they could do with having the last one around 1am” [Commuter, off-peak]

“Last year we went to the O2 for the first time but coming home we had to get a cab because I didn’t realise the trains don’t run late enough” [Business, London]

6.2 Reliability

Passenger views on this critical performance dimension are broadly consistent. The majority understand why it is difficult to guarantee trains will always run on time, especially on busy commuter routes into a major city such as London. Taking this into consideration, feelings about the reliability and punctuality of SWT services are broadly positive. However, across the sample, passengers understandably expressed dissatisfaction in relation to experiences of services that are delayed or cancelled.

When delivered, service reliability is highly valued among all passengers and especially among London commuters. On balance, the overall view tends to be that SWT’s record in this area has been improving to the extent that it is now considered to be good. Nevertheless, many recognise there is still room for improvement in this area and this was sometimes expressed in the context of reliability problems experienced in the recent past.

“It depends which direction you are going regarding punctuality. If you are going to London it’s not too bad. If you are going West or South it only needs one train out of sync and the knock-on effect is frustrating” [Commuter, Salisbury]

“The train might be delayed two or three minutes in the morning which is nothing but it’s worse in the evening and might be five or ten minutes late leaving Waterloo” [Commuter, inside M25 U40]

“Recently South West have been really bad, they’ve been delayed a lot because there have been a lot of problems at Waterloo” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

Some are aware that reliability has been improved as a consequence of revisions to timetables. A few are cynical about the fact that journey time has been made longer on certain routes in order to reduce the likelihood of a train being classed as late and recognise this to be a tactic to improve the performance data of the TOC rather than to deliver a benefit to customers. However, the majority understand and accept the trade-off between longer journey times and service reliability and most claim to prefer services to be more punctual at the expense of a slightly longer journey. The reason given for this is that it helps reduce the frequency of delays that may otherwise occur on a regular basis to ensure they are kept within more acceptable limits. This is offset to some extent by those living at the end of affected routes who point out that this may add over an hour to their commuting time every week compared to the previous timetable.

“A while ago they built in dwell time to the timetable to improve punctuality. I prefer the trains to arrive on time but it can be a bit frustrating sitting at stations and outside Waterloo sometimes” [Business, London]

6.3 Journey times

The majority of passengers consider journey times across the network to be generally acceptable. This is in the context of universal understanding of the need to provide a mix of fast and stopping services on certain routes. Some longer-distance London commuters acknowledge journey times to be short enough to allow them to enjoy the dual benefits of living in home-county areas such as Guildford and Reading while enjoying the advantages of the London job market. Some leisure users cite journey times (to London) as being an important factor influencing decisions to travel by train, especially in direct comparison to other modes.

“It’s a known start and end time. Driving can sometimes be quicker but lots of times it will be dramatically longer but the train is a known thing” [Leisure, Salisbury]

“Sometimes it can take you an hour to drive up to London, sometimes it can take three hours so that’s the thing with the train, it’s the reliability of knowing you’re going to get there in time for an event” [Leisure, Guildford]

6.4 Disruption - information

The extent to which information is available at times of service disruption is an acid test for the TOC from a passenger perspective. This is especially true for commuters who travel most frequently or others making time-critical journeys and particularly in the case of significant events rather than minor disruptions.

Indeed, passengers may be more likely to judge the TOC on the basis of the way in which the disruption is dealt with rather than as a result of the disruption itself (since a certain amount of disruption is recognised as being unavoidable). The quantity and quality of information provided is therefore key to perceptions of the way in which disruption is handled.

“Those electronic indicator boards can update you if the train is running late so it’s not as if you are stood there like a lemon not knowing what’s going on” [Leisure, Bournemouth]

“They should give you as much information as possible so at least you know what’s going on and how long you’re going to be delayed. More information is better than less” [Leisure, Bournemouth]

One of the critical requirements in this respect is for the TOC to know more about the nature of the problem than passengers, or at least to be able to give the impression of doing so convincingly. The most frequent example of this cited in the research is the frequency with which updates are provided. The overwhelming preference among passengers is to receive communications from staff at regular intervals, even if this is simply to say that no further information is available. This creates the belief that staff are doing their best to help passengers rather than the alternative position of keeping quiet and appearing not to care.

“There is an expectation they will communicate with us to provide an understanding of what’s going on before it gets to the point where it becomes a bit rude and you think ‘hold on a minute, I’m a paying customer’” [Business, Guildford]

“Things are going to happen that are beyond the train company’s control or the conductor’s control or whatever, it’s unavoidable, so sometimes there will be a situation, but communicate that to your customers” [Commuter, Salisbury]

Customers understand there may be times when the TOC is unable to offer a realistic estimate of when the next service will be available and the most important requirement in these circumstances is for staff to be honest and realistic. In some instances it may be appropriate to communicate that trains are unlikely to run for the foreseeable future or to suggest alternative modes of transport and to provide assistance in this respect, as required.

“Sometimes it seems like there’s nobody in charge to tell all the people wandering around there aren’t going to be any trains for two hours and that they should go away and think about getting home by bus or something” [Business, London]

Passenger views regarding the use of social media during disruption are mixed. Of those who are frequent users of Twitter, some would not consider using it as a supplementary source of information either because they expect nothing helpful to be available from the TOC or because it is unlikely to offer anything other than passengers complaining about being delayed. However, some with experience of

using Twitter for this purpose claim the SWT feed to be helpful and responsive and for the feed to be among the best of the train companies or even of other service providers in other sectors.

“They get back to you quickly on Twitter, they’re even better than TfL. It’s the best way to get a reaction because they are worried about the reputational impact if you make them look bad” [Commuter, off-peak]

“Their Twitter team get hammered with people moaning at them but they responded to me in a courteous manner with the information I wanted which made me wonder why the guard didn’t know. I use Twitter a lot and see different Twitter handles and they are one of the better ones I think” [Business, Guildford]

In addition to the quality and quantity of information provided at times of disruption, consistency across different channels is also important for passengers. A lack of consistency in this respect can be a source of frustration for passengers and can make the TOC look incompetent. Social media is occasionally used to illustrate the presence of gaps in this respect since it can demonstrate that the TOC has the facility to provide information in real time to passengers via its Twitter feed but is apparently unable to communicate with its own staff in the same way.

“Their Twitter is quite good and it tells you what the delays are. They know before the staff do at the train station so I don’t know how that works” [Commuter, inside M25 U40]

6.5 Disruption - specifics

Bus replacement services

This is regarded as a last resort by most passengers (often on the basis of poor previous experiences). The primary need in this event is therefore for ample advance warning to be made available at the earliest opportunity. Passengers want to know if a bus replacement service will be in operation at the time they book the journey or buy tickets in order to decide whether to go ahead with the journey or make alternative arrangements. However, respondents on the Isle of Wight spoke of positive experiences of using a bus replacement service when significant engineering works were being conducted.

“Engineering works can be a pain in the neck but I find the internet is quite often inaccurate so I ring National Rail Enquiries and ask if there are any bus replacements” [Leisure, Guildford]

“There’s a lot of engineering works on the route from the Isle of Wight, especially on a Sunday, so I always look online and I’m careful not to get the service with a bus” [Leisure, Guildford]

“When we had the track replaced and it was closed for about ten weeks, we had a coach service and the conductors went on the coaches which was fine, they picked up at bus stops, at every place, there was one at Brading, one at Sandown, one at Shanklin on the main road, it worked well” [Commuter/Leisure, Isle of Wight]

Taxis

A small number of passengers have experience of using taxis provided by the TOC when the scheduled service has been unavailable. This tends to be in response to a one-off event rather than as a long-term alternative during planned engineering works or other disruption events. Unsurprisingly a taxi is preferred as an alternative over a bus although some difficulties were reported on the Isle of Wight in relation to insufficient taxis being available due to the TOC claiming to be limited to using a specific taxi company in the local area rather than having the freedom to book the required number of cars to cope with passenger numbers.

“I know that the staff have complained that they’re now tied into certain taxi companies, whereas before, they’d phone one taxi company in Shanklin and one in Ryde and start immediately, but they’re tied to a company in Ryde, so they have to wait for the Ryde one to come through to Shanklin to pick the people up there and the staff said they found it frustrating, because they’re just standing there being moaned at” [Commuter/Leisure, Isle of Wight]

Waterloo engineering works

Awareness of the planned work is extremely low across the sample. The majority are pleased to learn about the nature of the work and assume additional platforms will help to increase capacity at Waterloo but are concerned about the lack of information available to date and the way in which the work will impact on journeys. Since the primary concern for many is the way in which disruption is dealt with rather than the nature of the disruption itself, there is a clear need for the current knowledge gap to be addressed by the TOC. In relation to this issue, TfL was occasionally cited as a good example to follow in terms of the way in which customers are informed about disruptions to services.

“It will be a good investment for the future. Hopefully there won’t be a huge amount of disruption but I hope they provide advice because I don’t know anything about it” [Leisure, Guildford]

“They must at least have a start date and the fact they haven’t told us anything about it makes them seem really incompetent. They should put posters up in the stations and in the trains, like they did for the rugby” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

7 Staff

7.1 Experiences

Overall, passengers feel positively towards staff. The majority consider that on most occasions when staff have been encountered the experience has been pleasant and successful. There is a common view that staff are often attracted to the work due to an underlying interest in trains and that this helps them to do their job well, often under difficult circumstances. The perception of staff having an interest in trains helps passengers believe that staff are more likely to be knowledgeable and helpful if assistance is required.

“I have often found staff to be very passionate, they’re enthusiastic, train-y people, and they are always very polite” [Leisure, Bournemouth]

“You can tell the old boys at Woking really care about their job and what they’re doing which is really sweet because they went into the profession to work with trains” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

“There’s a willingness to help and you don’t just get dismissed by staff anymore, you get respect which is good and must be engendered by the people at the top” [Business, Guildford]

In spite of this general view, there are occasions when passengers have had different experiences. There were occasional reports of staff having an unhelpful attitude or giving the impression of being unsociable or unfriendly. However, the common view is that this tends to be the exception rather than the rule and most recognise that poor experiences are restricted to an individual level rather than being typical of the service provided by SWT staff universally. This is usually explained in terms of ‘everyone being allowed to have a bad day’, or something along those lines. Some also have sympathy for staff that often have to deal with being put under pressure by lots of customers at once, especially when services are disrupted.

“Sometimes staff aren’t kept up to date themselves and it must be horrible for them because they have loads of customers asking and they don’t have the information to give them” [Commuter, Guildford]

Experiences or observations of how staff handle passengers travelling without a valid ticket are inconsistent. In situations where a genuine mistake appears to have been made, staff are sometimes sympathetic and understanding and at other times will issue a penalty fare. This leads passengers to assume SWT does not have a policy on this issue but instead allows staff to use their discretion. On balance, this is generally considered to be the correct approach.

“I went two extra stops to meet my wife and the guy on the train caught me and ranted at me for five minutes about fare-dodging but didn’t charge me a penalty fare because I didn’t have any cash on me and he couldn’t take a card” [Commuter, inside M25 U40]

“This French lady had an Oyster card or something completely wrong and the guy was really nice about it and explained the system but I saw a similar thing and a woman shouted at this person and humiliated them in front of everybody” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

7.2 What passengers value

Passengers will have different needs from staff according to the circumstances of their journey. However most agree that the thing they value most is the reassurance provided by a visible staff presence at stations and on trains.

“Some people may need help getting on or off and when the carriages are emptier late at night it would be nice to know where the guard is” [Business, London]

“I think it’s very eerie being on a station that’s not manned; you don’t feel safe, do you? If something happens you want to know a member of staff will be there” [Leisure, Bournemouth]

Other things that are widely valued at a customer service level can be summarised as follows:

At stations

- Having answers to most questions passengers are likely to need to ask in relation to their journeys due to extensive knowledge of train-related matters
- Providing advice about the best route and cheapest fares (especially for less frequent users)
- Providing assistance and information when needed (and occasionally being proactive in this respect)
- Having a friendly and helpful attitude towards passengers.

“I’ve seen a conductor helping out at the ticket office, letting people buy tickets off him to help reduce the queues. It doesn’t happen often but I have seen it at Salisbury” [Leisure, Salisbury]

“The other day the queue for the ticket office was out of the door and there was a guy on the platform standing there doing nothing so he should have come in to help get the queue down” [Business, London]

On trains

- The ability to buy a ticket when it has not been possible to do so before boarding the train
- Dealing with genuine mistakes sympathetically in the event of a passenger not having a valid ticket
- Checking tickets (in order to minimise the opportunity for people to try to avoid paying the fare)
- Make appropriate service-related announcements
- Provide advice on interchanging and connecting services when needed.

“You don’t know who’s right and who’s wrong but it’s how the staff deal with the person because they are the face of South West. I once got the wrong ticket and was treated pretty horribly but South West have improved their image quite a bit so I can imagine them being a lot friendlier now” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

7.3 Customer service

Participants in this research have limited experience of customer service contact beyond the type of interactions with staff outlined above and previously. The concept of customer service provision from SWT is therefore invisible and intangible to most. Isolated individual experiences of specific issues were reported by a small number of passengers and these can be summarised as follows:

Compensation

Three alternative views were highlighted in this research:

1. One or two reported positive experiences of claiming compensation for delayed journeys. The online process is considered to be simple and efficient and can help to make passengers feel better about a poor journey experience. An annual season ticket holder welcomed the fact that compensation for delays to his journey throughout the year is automatically calculated and deducted from the cost of the next season ticket on renewal.
2. Some are aware of the compensation scheme but are unfamiliar with the details of it. They believe there may have been occasions when they would have been entitled to claim compensation but have not done so due to the expectation that the process would be complex and lengthy and / or the belief that the amount they would receive would not justify the effort involved.
3. Many are unfamiliar with the scheme and are unaware of which journeys qualify for compensation since this is not made clear via announcements on delayed trains, for example.

Refund

A couple of passengers had previous experience of claiming a refund for an unused portion of an annual season ticket and for an unused ticket for a cancelled service. In each case this proved to be a complex and frustrating experience that took a long time to process. This was compounded by poor service provision for one customer who subsequently needed to contact SWT and his bank to establish why the refund had not been received

“The guy at the station couldn’t do a refund on my annual ticket so he filled out a form and three weeks later I called them and they had no idea. I had to call a team leader three times before I got any decent communication” [Commuter, inside M25 U40]

“The customer service is very lengthy, so to deal with that particular claim took a period of nine months and it resulted in a negative for me” [Commuter, outside M25 40+]

“I didn’t think it was worth the effort to go through the process of trying to get a refund but my boss eventually did get the money back but he was on the phone for more than an hour” [Commuter/Leisure, Bournemouth]

8 Island Line

8.1 Service provision

One focus group was conducted in Ryde comprising an equal mix of commuters and leisure users. Overall, users recognise the limitations of the service and in general are very happy with it. The general consensus is that the Island Line is doing a good job in difficult circumstances. Responses to key elements of service provision can be summarised as follows:

Stations

These are acknowledged to be mostly functional with only basic facilities available. In particular, the supply of shelter, seating and lighting at all stations is considered to be inadequate. Staff are thought to be available only at the stations at either end of the line and only at certain times of the day. In spite of these apparently negative views, most agree the poor standard of stations does not have a negative impact on journey experiences since the service is reliable and most therefore tend not to spend much time at stations.

“People don’t get to the station much before their train goes because the trains are quite punctual, very few people end up waiting at the station for much more than five minutes...” [Commuter/Leisure, Isle of Wight]

Trains

Passengers understand the reason for the trains being what they are and accept them on this basis. A more important consideration is the fact that the trains are considered to be suitable even for the longest journey it is possible to make on the route and they are always clean and tidy inside. The comfort of the journey is felt to be variable and depends entirely on the driver and the way the train is driven. Passengers are however concerned about the age of the rolling stock which is assumed to be near the end of its life with no plans that any are aware of to replace it in the foreseeable future.

“The main bugbear is the tunnel down at Ryde, getting rolling stock that will fit through it. There isn’t anything manufactured that will fit through it, and the investment required to manufacture ones that would fit through there would be prohibitive, so the only trains that will fit through is ex-underground tube stock, which is what the island’s using at the moment, so it’s doing the best that it can in the circumstances that it’s got” [Commuter/Leisure, Isle of Wight]

A problem was identified with revenue collection on trains at certain times. When the train is being used by school children and also at other busy times, the conductor is often unable to collect fares from passengers before they alight. Although there was no real sense of passengers deliberately attempting to evade the fare, respondents acknowledged it would be easy to take advantage of this situation and it seems to be almost accepted as a characteristic of the service.

“Quite a few children get away with paying, because where there are two carriages and there is one conductor, he does one carriage at one point, gets up to Brading, maybe, and then swaps over to the next carriage, so people who’ve got on at Brading, they get a free journey maybe to Ryde [Commuter/Leisure, Isle of Wight]

Integration

This emerged as the only area of real dissatisfaction with the Island Line. The coordination of trains with crossings to the mainland is a major problem for those who make this journey as their regular commute. Two specific issues were identified in this respect:

- If a train is late arriving in Ryde, the catamaran will always wait to allow passengers from the train to board before departure. However, the reverse does not apply and trains will never wait for those making the connection, even if passengers are disembarking the catamaran

“We get abandoned on the pier head on a regular basis by the train that is supposed to connect with the boat that leaves Portsmouth at twenty to the hour” [Commuter/Leisure, Isle of Wight]

- The last train from either end of the line is much too early to cater for those wanting to return home by train after a night out on the Island or the mainland

***“If I go out in Portsmouth and get the last cat back, there is no train on the summer timetable so I have to walk from the pier head to St. Johns. I don’t understand why the trains don’t run until the cats stop”
[Commuter/Leisure, Isle of Wight]***

***“If you go out in Shanklin you can get abandoned there if you miss the last train and it’s too expensive to get a taxi. I think the last train is 10.18 which is no good if you are going out for a meal or to the theatre”
[Commuter/Leisure, Isle of Wight]***

Value for money

In spite of some of the limitations of the service highlighted above, the majority are very positive about the fare they pay for their journeys and the value for money this represents. The Island Line is recognised as being a cheaper and preferable way to travel compared to using the bus or making journeys by car, especially due to congestion that can occur during the tourist season.

“I will always choose the train over the bus. It’s more direct, it’s quicker, it’s cheaper, I don’t know if it’s more comfortable but it’s fine and the staff are better” [Commuter/Leisure, Isle of Wight]

In relation to the value for money issue, one respondent mentioned that Hovertravel and Wightlink sell academic season tickets but that the same facility is not available for the Island Line.

8.2 Views on new franchise

Awareness that the South Western franchise is being re-tendered is much higher on the Isle of Wight than in any of the other locations represented in the research. Some had heard rumours about proposals for the future and were very worried about them. The key concern in this respect is that the Island Line may not be part of the new franchise and passengers were hoping to hear from the research what the implications would be for service provision after 2017. The majority of the group were wary of the concept of a ‘social enterprise’ and, in the absence of clear answers to questions regarding re-franchising, passengers are clearly worried that the current service provision is likely to deteriorate.

“A government minister said the Island Line isn’t going to be part of the new franchise and that no-one will pick up the service” [Commuter/Leisure, Isle of Wight]

“It doesn’t matter if it makes a loss, it provides a vital service on the island and the new franchise holder should have to take the rough with the smooth” [Commuter/Leisure, Isle of Wight]

***“I’ve got a horrible feeling they will try to turn the Island Line into a steam railway for tourists”
[Commuter/Leisure, Isle of Wight]***

“Because it’s the Government, the cynic in me would probably suggest that Stagecoach or somebody has gone to the Government and said ‘actually, we will bid for this if you get rid of the Island Line in your specification’” [Commuter/Leisure, Isle of Wight]

9 Franchise issues

9.1 SWT / Stagecoach

SWT

The vast majority of passengers have little understanding of who or what SWT is. In spite of often positive views in relation to the current service provision, there is minimal evidence of any strong feelings towards the brand and nothing that could be regarded as an emotional connection.

“I don’t think anything about South West Trains; it’s just a train, isn’t it? I don’t get a warm glow when I think about them, I just think of them as being easy, quick and reliable” [Commuter/Leisure, Bournemouth]

Although passengers seem to feel no sense of any genuine relationship with SWT, many recognise that improvements have been made to various aspects of the service provision over recent years and gratitude for this is expressed in terms of a ‘could be worse’ sentiment.

“Maybe I’m strange but I don’t think there’s anything really terrible about South West at the moment, I really don’t” [Commuter, Off-peak]

For the minority who follow SWT on Twitter, there is a feeling that this relationship through social media strengthens their connection to the brand.

“They engage with people, they don’t just push adverts and marketing out, they actually have conversations with customers” [Business, Guildford]

Stagecoach

Only a small number are spontaneously aware that the South West Trains franchise is operated by Stagecoach. When mentioned by a respondent or the moderator, the name achieves a high level of prompted awareness and is more often associated with buses rather than trains. Although attitudes to the service provided by SWT are often positive, responses to Stagecoach tended to elicit a negative reaction across this sample. Some feel the company has a poor media profile, much of which appears to be focused around the owners.

“It’s run by a Scottish chap who’s not all that popular south of the border and is seen by a lot of commuters as being quite greedy because South West Trains are not afraid to put their fares up” [Commuter, Guildford]

9.2 Awareness of re-franchising

Passengers have minimal knowledge of the franchising process and no awareness of how long the current franchise has been operating. Some are surprised to hear this has been running since 2006 but others are neutral and have no views one way or the other. None have any recollection of what was in place before 2006.

Almost all welcome the news that the franchise is to be re-tendered in 2017. This is not because they are unhappy with the current service provision but due to a widespread belief that having TOCs competing against each other for the right to operate the franchise in future is in the best interests of customers. Some however are cynical about the likely nature of the re-franchising process and assume the ultimate decision will be made on the basis of cost rather than on the basis of what is likely to be in the best interests of passengers.

“It’s good in theory but will it be judged on service or return on investment? We need to know how it will be measured” [Commuter, Off-peak]

“It keeps the company on their toes because if they are performing badly they know they will be out on their ear so I like the idea of it” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

“As a commuter I would be looking at how much money they are going to invest in the service, or is it all going to be about their bottom line?” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

Views on the optimal length of the new franchise were consistent across the sample. Most can appreciate the arguments for and against short or long contract periods but the general feeling is that five years is unlikely to be long enough for an operator to have a realistic chance to make an impact and a difference (especially in the event of the contract being awarded to a new franchisee rather than the incumbent).

“The brand needs to grow and they need time to have new ideas so I think five years is probably a bit short” [Commuter, outside M25 U40]

Most consider that a minimum period of 10 years is required in order to encourage the TOC to commit the level of investment to the franchise that passengers would like to see. To prevent the possibility of passengers having to tolerate an under-performing TOC for this amount of time, some would like to see the new franchise awarded with a mid-term break clause to provide the DfT with the opportunity to evaluate the performance of the franchisee against their original bid commitments. Some feel this would be a reasonable way to ensure the TOC does not become complacent after winning the contract and the same mechanism could also be used as an effective way to hold the TOC to account for the duration of the franchise period.

“Ten years is a long time to get it wrong if the company is not performing but it probably needs to be that long to get a return on the capital invested” [Leisure, Guildford]

“No-one will invest if they haven’t got long enough to get a return on their capital” [Business, Guildford]

“There could be a break clause that said if they have only been running it for four years and they’re not up to scratch the contract could be called in and reallocated” [Leisure, Guildford]

10 Disability issues

Six depth interviews were conducted among passengers with disabilities. The purpose of these interviews is to understand a number of specific issues from the perspective of individuals with a disability who make journeys on the network. The aim is to provide topline and examples of journey experiences and the findings are therefore summarised below in the form of case studies rather than attempting to present them as typical of disability types or issues faced.

10.1 Case study 1: Mobility impaired passenger

- Female living in the Surrey area
- Unable to guarantee getting a disabled parking space at the station so has to take a taxi
- Disabled Railcard discount welcomed but fares for partner and family travelling to London for hospital visits are expensive
- Needs to use the lift at the station which has always been working
- Main problem is inability to get a seat when travelling at peak times (for hospital appointments)
- Nature of disability is invisible so passengers unlikely to give up seats (and reluctant to ask)
- Could show proof of medical condition (but embarrassed to do so)

“I shouldn’t have to prove I have a disability and even if I do people think I’m pulling a fast one and I don’t want the stress of begging for a seat because it’s humiliating”

- Pregnant women have a badge or can use first class so would like something similar

“Pregnant women are allowed to sit in first class but I can’t which makes my partner angry and that makes the journey more stressful for me”

- One member of staff issues a permit to use first class for medical reasons but others won’t

“There is a lovely man at the station who gives me a chitty to say I can sit in first class because of my condition but he is the only one who does it for some reason I don’t understand”

- Recently started using crutches which make a difference as others now offer their seats.

10.2 Case study 2: Mobility impaired passenger with cognitive impairment

- Male living in Wiltshire.
- Also has impaired thinking and processing capabilities
- Always plans journeys in advance by using paper timetables and by speaking to staff face-to-face at the stations
- Finds technology such as the internet or TVMs too difficult to use or comprehend
- Feels that all facilities at stations etc. are sufficient for his journeys
- Can become disoriented if overwhelmed with passengers and noises

“Because of my brain injury, I can get quite easily confused so need to be able to ask staff to direct me sometimes or show me the best route to a platform”

- More common in the past for a member of staff to ask him if he needs help (disability or not) but doesn’t often see staff doing that now.

“It’s as if the conductors or some staff look like they don’t want to be there. They stamp tickets and move on, there’s not much customer service”

10.3 Case study 3: Wheelchair user

- Female living in the Surrey area
- Limited parking and unsure if disabled parking would be available but has easy access to station so doesn't need to drive
- Local station is not accessible so need to take longer route to entrance since unable to use stairs
- Planning journeys is stressful since uncertain about connections and availability of lifts etc.
- Lack of staff at certain stations necessitates detailed planning which is frustrating.

“Planning a journey is like a military operation and very stressful because I want to be independent but I get to an impasse. I tried to go to Greenwich but it looked too complicated so I went on the river bus because it was simpler”

- Unable to use electric wheelchair as unable to manage gaps between train and platform at local station and others
- Once tried to use a different station without booking assistance and staff made a fuss about getting ramp out of storage
- Electric wheelchair can't cope with gradient of ramps at some stations
- Travelled in Portugal where there are permanent ramps on platforms for those in wheelchairs and with pushchairs
- Husband deals with tickets due to uncertainty about whether staff will be available at local station
- Unsure if able to use TVM from wheelchair but assume not and reluctant to ask other passengers for assistance
- Expect local station is unlikely to have a wheelchair accessible toilet

“Wheelchair users aren't considered first and foremost and we are certainly not considered to the same extent as people with babies”

- Waterloo also has big gaps between trains and platforms but otherwise caters well for wheelchairs
- New trains spacious enough to accommodate wheelchairs but dedicated spaces are separate from other seats

“It would just be nice to be able to sit with my family on the train rather than being segregated in what feels like the wheelchair parking area”

- Assume trains will have at least one accessible toilet but try to avoid using as unlikely to be clean since used by all other passengers.

10.4 Case study 4: Vision impaired passenger

- Male living in Southwest London and uses a white cane
- Always plans journeys by phone using Passenger Assist option and unable to fault service
- However, would like to know platform numbers in advance (and is unaware of online facilities that provide this)
- Unable to use TVMs so always needs to be able to buy ticket from staff
- Some confusion over inconsistency between different networks about what time Freedom Pass can be used and can result in not paying the correct fare

“South West Trains say I can't use my Freedom Pass before 9.30 but I can when I travel on London Overground so I don't know if that's because they are TfL but I'm never really sure whether I have got the right ticket”

- Most stations cater well for needs of vision impaired passengers with accessible facilities and good announcements
- Confident at interchanges because he travels a lot and staff are always helpful and often offer assistance when they see the white cane (although staff not always readily available on platforms of certain stations e.g. Clapham Junction)
- Three suggestions offered to make station use easier:
 1. Have large platform numbers on the ground rather than above eye level to help prevent vision impaired passengers getting confused, especially at busy stations with multiple platforms, such as Waterloo
 2. Improve the design of information points to provide clearer distinction between the emergency button and the information button. These should also ideally be sited at the entrance to the platform rather than somewhere along it to avoid the need to ask passengers to help locate it
 3. At gated stations the Oyster reader should be lit on the barriers that are available for use to help vision impaired passengers determine which gate to use and to help locate the touch pad
- Avoids using accessible toilets since need to get staff to explain how to close and lock the door (so prefers cubicle style toilets and doors)

“The accessible toilets are good for wheelchair users but not for the blind. I try to avoid using them because you hear stories about the door opening on someone inside with their trousers round their ankles”

- Unsure what side the platform is on at arrival at certain stations e.g. Surbiton and often difficult to locate button to open doors since these are not in the same place on all trains (and across different franchises used)
- Often more difficult to find staff at times of disruption who can seem unprepared when the same problems reoccur and lack the necessary information.

“Staff at the barriers are always very helpful but I can very rarely find anyone on the platforms, including at Clapham Junction which I use a lot”

10.5 Case study 5: Vision impaired passenger

- Male living in Wiltshire but travels nationally using a white cane (has used a guide dog in the past and may again)
- Regularly makes trips in to the South West and goes to the Isle of Wight festival often
- Always plans journeys in advance and if in sufficient time, will book assistance for his journey. Not always possible though depending on how far in advance he is booking
- However, if visiting a new station, there is always some apprehension due to not knowing what the station layout is etc. and how to get in and out of it
- Unable to use TVMs so always needs to be able to buy ticket from staff or online at home in advance
- Feels other TOCs are better at asking if he needs assistance during his trip. On his journey to the interview, not one member of staff either on the train or in the stations asked him if he needed any assistance even though he had his cane and had to show his Disabled Railcard when showing his ticket.
- Can sometimes find it hard to find staff at stations to help him
- Unable to see information displays on trains and often hard to hear announcements so has to rely on asking other passengers about when to get off the train

“Because it’s red, I think, red on black and they’re too far away. You know, what they need to have is kind of in the middle, from one train to the other, I mean from here it’s difficult to see further than this (across the table)”

- People ignore the priority seating and not policed by TOCs.

“There are no rules at all. They’ve got this thing called priority seats, a sticker, but there are no rules that say on it, ‘have some consideration for everybody, if you’re going to come on the train’”

10.6 Case study 6: Hearing impaired passenger

- Female living in Southwest London
 - Unable to use hearing loop but prefers to plan journeys online rather than on the phone.
 - Ideally needs to be able to see person to be able to lip read to help understanding
 - Uses Oyster to minimise need to interact with staff since can be difficult to hear and understand in a busy station with lots of noise and distractions. Also assumes this is the cheapest way to travel
- “I don’t have a Freedom Pass yet so tend to use Oyster when I go into London but I have never thought about getting a Disabled Railcard and whether that might be cheaper”***
- Also lacks confidence in TVMs
 - Main problem at stations is volume of people since hearing aid amplifies background noises
 - Can become confused if overwhelmed with passengers and noises
- “It depends on the station but Clapham Junction is very old and I can get disoriented if I am in that tunnel when there are lots of other people around”***
- Can be hard to find staff and difficult to lip read in busy environment
 - Station announcements now clearer than used to be but struggle with heavy accents
 - Announcements often drowned out by noise of passing trains
- “The announcements are better now than they used to be but it depends on the person but the problem at Clapham Junction is that there are so many trains that the voices get lost and become difficult to understand”***
- Relies heavily on visual information displays at stations
 - Unlikely to need to rely on train announcements since familiar with route but need to be able to understand in the event of disruption or other problems
 - Ideally prefer to be able to see dot matrix display as back-up
 - Prefer to sit in quiet coach when available, especially if travelling with others to make conversation easier.

11 Conclusions

11.1 Passenger experience

- Overall, passengers consider their experience of South West Trains to be mixed. A number of encouraging signs have been identified from this research although there are clearly opportunities for improvement in a number of areas under the new franchise following re-tendering in 2017.
- Passengers have positive views about the rolling stock introduced within the current franchise period. All regard the new trains to be a considerable improvement over the rolling stock inherited by Stagecoach and attitudes in this respect epitomise some of the positive feelings expressed among users. Passengers are unaware of how rolling stock is financed and the benefit derived from making journeys on new trains tends not to mitigate negative feelings in relation to annual fare increases.
- Findings in relation to critical aspects of performance and service delivery are interesting. Regular commuters recognise they pay the highest fares and are likely to suffer the worst travelling conditions but often display more (resigned) acceptance than leisure and business users who travel less frequently and usually under more favourable conditions. This is a function of journey length and passenger expectations. Those who account for the highest volume of journeys tend to be commuters living in and around London. These passengers tend to have relatively short journeys and pragmatic expectations when travelling at peak times. Those making other types of journeys, often outside peak hours, anticipate more favourable conditions and are likely to be less tolerant on occasions when expectations are not met.
- In spite of some problems experienced in the recent past, some acknowledge attempts to improve punctuality on certain routes. In an ideal world, passengers would like to have frequent trains that are always punctual with journey times as short as possible. Some are aware that improved reliability may be at the expense of slightly longer journeys but, on balance, the majority accept the trade-off and consider the emphasis to have been placed in the correct area.
- However, there is still room for improvement on critical dimensions of service delivery. If contingency is built into timetables by lengthening journey times and delays still occur, passengers are likely to become less tolerant of the TOC's attempts to improve its reliability record if they perceive they are getting the worst of both worlds.
- Overcrowding is a substantial challenge and is not just a commuter or peak issue. Some recognise trains may have been designed to accommodate more standing passengers and understand the rationale for this but frustration over the inability to get a seat is likely to translate into dissatisfaction when it is not possible to stand safely or comfortably, especially if this is experienced on a regular basis.
- It is understandable that the predictable customer response to overcrowding is an expectation that the TOC should meet demand by providing longer or more frequent trains, since appreciation of network constraint issues is low. It is therefore important to bear in mind that current concerns about capacity will be exacerbated by any increase in passenger demand for services in the near future.
- Service frequency is generally considered to be at least acceptable on most routes although a few specific exceptions have been identified where passengers would like to see perceived gaps filled. Passengers in all locations would like last services to be later than they currently are (and the need for this in London especially is likely to intensify when London Underground begins to provide a 24 hour service).
- Passenger views regarding fares are often based on inaccurate perceptions of the fare structure rather than their knowledge or understanding of it. Some are therefore uncertain about whether they always obtain the correct ticket for their journey or whether best value for money is obtained. This is equally true for commuters as less frequent users.

- Many commuters are unaware of the financial benefits offered by season tickets or feel they are not in a position to be able to take advantage of them. This indicates a role for the TOC to provide clearer communications around season tickets in future.
- Negative views about fares are fuelled by annual fare increases that are at a higher rate than wages are rising for most, especially in the current climate. This is offset to some extent by positive value for money perceptions of the franchise which are favourably influenced by a number of factors including the rolling stock, punctuality improvements, Advance fares and the lack of realistic alternatives to making certain journeys by rail.
- Some passengers have positive experiences of the SWT Twitter feed, especially at times of unplanned service disruption. This fulfils universal needs for the TOC to be proactive and to give the impression of knowing more than customers in such situations. It also indicates the potential for information to be consistent and coordinated across all channels and there is evidence from the research to suggest that further progress in this area would be welcomed.
- In the context of passengers wanting the TOC to be honest and transparent in the area of information provision, some are concerned about their lack of awareness of planned engineering works at Waterloo station. This is an issue that needs to be addressed immediately by the TOC.
- Most have minimal awareness of the imminent re-franchising or the nature of the process. Even those who are broadly satisfied welcome the bidding competition due to a belief that it is likely to be in their best interests as passengers. However, some have reservations about their lack of input into and control over the outcome and are in a position of hoping for the best but expecting the worst.
- It is unsurprising that passengers would like to see a commitment to invest in the network after 2017 (whether this is the ultimate responsibility of the franchisee or other parties such as the DfT). A number of areas have been identified from this research for future investment that will be appreciated by passengers and is likely to be reflected in subsequent satisfaction ratings:
 - Some stations are likely to require modernisation during the next franchise period. There is evidence from the research to suggest that some are in danger of falling below the minimum threshold of acceptability in terms of their ability to meet the most basic passenger needs such as safety and security, shelter and the provision of toilets (and others lack higher level comfort facilities such as catering).
 - Providing free wi-fi on trains may help to mitigate the current problem with phone signals and could potentially improve satisfaction if journey experiences are enhanced by being made more comfortable or productive via this facility.
 - Staff presence and visibility is highly valued by passengers who would like to see this improved at stations and on trains, either through the provision of additional staff or more efficient deployment of current resources.
 - Passengers would welcome better provision and communication of information, especially at times of unplanned disruption and particularly since many now have higher expectations of TOCs due to the increasing penetration of apps and social media.
 - There may be opportunities to improve value for money perceptions through better promotion of the benefits of an annual season ticket and the introduction of enhanced ticketing technologies.

The points expressed above are derived from views expressed by passengers across all focus groups on the range of issues covered in discussion.

At the end of each of the focus groups, respondents were divided into syndicate groups and asked to summarise what they would like to retain about the current SWT offer and what they would like to see improved during the next franchise period. A summary of the output from these exercises is provided in the following sections.

11.2 Current strengths: to maintain

The research provided a broad consensus in terms of areas in which SWT are felt to perform strongly and provides the basis of aspects of the service that passengers want to see retained:

- Critical performance aspects
 - service frequency and punctuality
- Satisfaction with new rolling stock
 - hoped future replacements will be to same standard
- Current levels of cleanliness
 - primarily associated with trains
 - stations to lesser extent
- Level of service provided by staff
 - maintain current staffing levels
 - ideally additional staff required

11.3 Improvement areas: to build upon

Key priorities in this respect are:

- Extra capacity and seats available
 - extra carriages / more frequent peak trains and later services
- Station enhancement and modernisation
 - shelter, seating, facilities, security
- Enhance on-train journey experiences
 - sockets, Wi-fi, USB ports, air conditioning
- Ticketing innovation
 - smart, e-tickets, links to updates
- Improved information provision
 - Real time, especially during disruption

Appendices

Focus Group Discussion Guide

Transport Focus South Western Franchise qualitative research Discussion guide – 120 minute focus groups

Purpose of research:

- To evaluate usage experiences among current users
- To assess strengths and weaknesses of various areas of service delivery
- To understand what passengers want from a new South Western franchise

Moderator: Please try to identify throughout discussion the specific locations/times relevant to the participants' comments

Introduction

- Explain AECOM role – MRS code – research for Transport Focus
- Purpose of group is to talk about use of and attitudes towards current SWT services and to explore aspirations and improvement priorities for the future South Western franchise.
- Indicate what we would ideally like to have a good understanding of the reasons why passengers have specific views about journeys made with SWT by the end of the session but explain that it is not necessary to reach a conclusion or consensus

Warm-up

- Paired introductions
- First name, occupation, background details
- One positive thing and one negative thing about using SWT
- Any other key themes to add to strengths and weaknesses identified

5 mins

Context

To understand nature and frequency of journeys made on SWT

- What train journeys do you make with SWT? Do they always make the same journeys by rail or different ones?
- Where to / from, what time of day / week
- What for - purpose of the journey
- Who else do you travel with
- Why do you use the train rather than other modes available
- How long have you been using SWT
- Any experience of using other TOCs

5 mins

Journey planning

To understand information requirements for journeys and how decisions are made to obtain best ticket and fare

- How much planning is required for the journeys you make with SWT
- How do you find out about service frequency and timetables
- Which information sources do you use before / during the journey
- What is good and bad about current information provision
- Which websites / apps do you use. How do these compare and meet your needs
- What would you like to see improved

Commuters

- What ticket types are available for your typical travel patterns
- Which ticket do you tend to use. Why. What are the influencing factors
- What information do you use to inform this choice. Is any additional information needed
- What options are available for buying tickets. Which do you use / avoid. What else is needed

Leisure users

- How do you go about planning leisure journeys. How easy / difficult is this
- What information types / sources are used / required
- What do you think about the range of tickets / fares available to match your travel plans
- How do you know the best type of ticket to buy for your journeys
- How much flexibility is needed for different days / times of travel

10 mins

Stations

To understand access, integration and interchange issues and the extent to which facilities provided cater for passenger needs

- How do you travel to / from the train stations you use
- How good is access by public transport and by car
- What do you think about the parking facilities available for cars and bikes
- What is it like to wait for a train at the stations you use
- What facilities are at the stations that you use? What do you need at stations at the start and end of journeys? And what would you like?
- How well do facilities provided meet your needs. How could this be improved
- What about the availability and visibility of staff?
- How easy / difficult is it to interchange on SWT journeys. What about when this is with a different TOC. How could it be better
- What information needs do you have at different stations. How well are these catered for. How could this be improved

15 mins

Trains

To assess seat comfort and availability, facilities provided and the extent to which these allow passengers to get the most out of travelling time

- What is reasonable to expect in terms of getting a seat for the journeys you make. How do you feel when you do / don't get a seat
- Getting a table seat
- Attitudes to ability to stand safely / comfortably when required, by journey length
- How comfortable are the seats, including configuration and spacing issues
- How do you feel about the cleanliness of the inside / outside of trains
- What do you think about the toilets on SWT trains
- What type of on-board catering is provided / required for different journey types
- What luggage storage facilities are provided / required
- What are your views on availability of Wi-Fi (both free and paid for), power sockets and charging facilities
- To what extent are you able to do what you want to do when travelling with SWT
- What would make journeys more comfortable
- Discuss about how productive time is on the train / or enjoyable / useful (depending on journey purpose) – what would make it more so.

15 mins

Performance indicators

How well do passengers feel SWT perform in terms of service reliability

- What do you think of the frequency of trains at times when you want to make journeys. What are your views on the first / last train times
- Are current scheduled journey times acceptable. How could this be improved
- Do trains arrive at starting / destination stations on time. What are the tolerance levels for day in – day out, and when exceptional circumstances apply
- Discuss expectations of punctuality as this is an important issue; also link either here or in section below with information when services not running to time (either as just a little late or when it is a formal disruption event).
- What information is provided / required regarding punctuality, what should be provided and to whom
- Role of the 'authorities' in overseeing punctuality/performance
- Do/would you make any adjustments to travel if you knew which trains were more/less punctual – what are trade-offs – have you seen this type of information
- Do/would you make any adjustments to travel if you knew which trains were more/less crowded – what are trade-offs – have you seen this type of information
- What is reasonable compensation for delays experienced. Views on how to claim

15 mins

Service disruption

To assess information needs and how SWT perform compared to other TOCs, especially commuters

- How do information needs differ at times of service disruption
- How do commuters expect to be communicated with. How does this differ for less frequent users
- How do needs differ according to the nature / severity of the disruption.
- How well do SWT perform in each of these circumstances and what is reasonable to expect in terms of accepting responsibility and taking action
- What do passengers want / expect if alternative transport needs to be provided
- Any awareness of planned engineering works at Waterloo and how is this expected to impact on journeys. What information needs are anticipated

10 mins

Staff and customer service

To understand perceptions of roles, especially in relation to communications

- What are your views on staff at stations and on trains. What role do they play. What would you miss about staff if they weren't available
- When / where are staff most / least needed to make a difference for passengers
- What do you expect from staff when communicating with passengers. What specifically in terms of answering correspondence, helplines, formal / informal complaints resolution and dealing with genuine ticket mistakes

10 mins

Fares and value for money

To be evaluated in the context of previous discussions

- What is your view about the fare you pay for journeys you make
- How are perceptions influenced by nature of journey and time of day / week
- What impact do season tickets have for commuters
- How do you assess whether what you get is good or poor VFM
- How would VFM perceptions be enhanced. What should a new franchisee focus on

10 mins

South Western franchise

Brief discussion to determine passenger awareness, understanding and interest

- Do you have any awareness of how rail franchising works. Who is the current franchise holder? What other franchises are they familiar with?
- How long has the current franchise been in place (and responses to this being 2006) and what have they seen/experienced at different stages of operation
- How do they feel about SWT as a company? Do they trust them? Respect them? Think that they care about their passengers? Are other TOCs any different? (Trying to get here the emotional feelings towards the brand.)
- What are your feelings about the franchise being retendered in 2017. and why?
- Views on the ideal length of a new franchise from a passenger perspective
- What are the implications in relation to investment and time to make improvements
- How well does the SWT network work in relation to neighbouring TOCs.
- **[For IoW discussion only – what views on future of Island Line -see recent DfT statement]**

5 mins

Future franchise expectations

Syndicate exercise to understand passenger priorities for change / improvement. One group to list things should be retained from current offering from SWT, the other group to identify what improvements a new franchisee should focus on. Review output and discuss

- How well are passenger needs currently being met
- What are passenger aspirations for the future
- What are the key improvement priorities for a new SW franchise
- Review areas identified in context of previous discussions
- What do they want from the next franchise operator in terms of customer service

15 mins**Summary**

- Get a consensus of one , two or three most important messages they want to get across having discussed this for a long time tonight.

5 mins

Recruitment screener

 Recruiter's Name + ID No:

Group No:

F2015/0559 SW JOURNEY

Q.1 We are conducting a survey in this area, but first could you tell me:

READ OUT AND CODE ACCORDINGLY

a. Do you or have you ever worked in any of the following occupations or industries?

b. Does any member of your family or close friends work or have they ever worked in any of the following occupations or industries?

ADVERTISING		1		1
MARKETING	1		1	
MARKET RESEARCH		1		1
JOURNALISM		1		1
PUBLIC RELATIONS	1		1	
PUBLIC TRANSPORT		1		1

NONE OF THESE	2		2	

IF RESPONDENT SAYS "YES" TO ANY OF THE ABOVE CODED 1 - CLOSE INTERVIEW

Q.2a Can you tell me how many group discussions or depth interviews have you attended in the last 5 years?

NONE	1	GO TO Q.3
ONE	2	ASK Q.2b
TWO	3	ASK Q.2b
THREE	4	ASK Q.2b
FOUR OR MORE	5	CLOSE

CLOSE INTERVIEW IF RESPONDENT HAS ATTENDED MORE THAN 3 GROUP DISCUSSIONS OR DEPTH INTERVIEWS IN THE LAST 5 YEARS.

Q.2b When did you last attend a group discussion or depth interview?

WRITE IN:

IF RESPONDENT HAS ATTENDED A GROUP DISCUSSION OR DEPTH INTERVIEW WITHIN THE LAST 6 MONTHS - CLOSE INTERVIEW.

Q.2c What subjects have you attended discussions on?

WRITE IN

EXCLUDE ALL RESPONDENTS WHO HAVE ATTENDED A GROUP DISCUSSION OR DEPTH INTERVIEW, WHICH IS CONNECTED IN ANY WAY WITH RAIL TRAVEL

Q.3 GENDER:

MALE 1

FEMALE 2

PLEASE RECRUIT A MIX OF MALES AND FEMALES PER GROUP, AND ACROSS THE DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Q.4 PLEASE CONFIRM YOUR AGE LAST BIRTHDAY:

AGE:.....

GROUPS 6, 9 & 11

MOST RESPONDENTS MUST BE AGED 25-55 YEARS OLD

GROUPS 1 & 3

ALL RESPONDENTS MUST BE UNDER 40 YEARS OLD

GROUPS 4 & 5

ALL RESPONDENTS MUST BE OVER 40 YEARS OLD

GROUP 8

ALL RESPONDENTS MUST BE UNDER 45 YEARS OLD

GROUPS 7 & 12

ALL RESPONDENTS MUST BE OVER 50 YEARS OLD

GROUP 10

ALL RESPONDENTS MUST BE UNDER 50 YEARS OLD

GROUPS 2, 13 & 14

RECRUIT A MIX OF AGES

RECRUIT A GOOD SPREAD OF AGES ACROSS EACH GROUP

Q.5 Do you ever travel on South West Trains?

Yes 1
No 2 CLOSE

ALL MUST USE SOUTH WEST TRAINS

Q.6 What is your main reason for travelling with South West Trains?

Commuting 1 LONDON Q7, OTHERS Q9
Leisure 3 Q11
Business 2 Q12

GROUPS 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11

ALL RESPONDENTS MUST USE SOUTH WEST TRAINS MAINLY TO COMMUTE

GROUPS 2 & 13

ALL RESPONDENTS MUST USE SOUTH WEST TRAINS MAINLY FOR BUSINESS

GROUPS 7, 10, 12

ALL RESPONDENTS MUST USE SOUTH WEST TRAINS MAINLY FOR LEISURE

GROUPS 8 & 14

TO BE A MIX OF COMMUTERS AND LEISURE USERS

ASK LONDON COMMUTER GROUPS ONLY

Q.7 Is the station you start your commute from inside or outside the M25?

Inside M25 1
Outside M25 2

GROUP 1, 4,

ALL RESPONDENTS MUST COMMUTE FROM A STATION INSIDE THE M25

GROUPS 3, 5

ALL RESPONDENTS MUST COMMUTE FROM A STATION OUTSIDE THE M25

GROUP 6

A MIX OF THOSE WHO COMMUTE FROM INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE M25

GROUPS 1, 3, 4, 5 & 6

AIM FOR A MIX OF LINES USED (CHECK SWT NETWORK MAP)

Q.8 Do you commute most often at Peak times ie before 9.30am and between 5pm to 7pm

Yes 1
No 2

GROUP 1, 3, 4, 5

ALL RESPONDENTS MUST COMMUTE AT PEAK TIMES MOST OFTEN

GROUP 6

ALL RESPONDENTS MUST COMMUTE AT OFF PEAK TIMES MOST OFTEN

ASK ALL COMMUTERS

Q.9 Which stations do you start and end your journey?

START _____

END _____

GROUPS 1, 3, 4, 5 & 6

PLEASE ENSURE WE RECRUIT A MIX OF STARTING STATIONS – MOST RESPONDENTS TO BE STARTING AT DIFFERENT STATIONS

GROUPS 9

RESPONDENTS TO BE COMMUTING TO A MIX OF DIRECTIONS AND DESTINATIONS FROM SALISBURY (EG LINES TO BRISTOL, EXETER, BASINGSTOKE ETC) BUT NOT TO ANY LONDON STATION INSIDE THE M25

GROUP 11

MIX OF THOSE WHO COMMUTE TO WOKING, TO STATIONS BETWEEN GUILDFORD AND PORTSMOUTH OR TO OTHER DESTINATIONS (BUT NOT TO ANY LONDON STATION WITHIN THE M25)

Q.9a How many days a week do you commute?

5 days a week	1
Fewer than 5 days a week	2

ENSURE MOST COMMUTE 5 DAYS A WEEK

Q.9b What type of ticket do you use?

Annual	1
Monthly	2
Weekly	3
Daily	4

RECRUIT A MIX OF DIFFERENT TICKET TYPES ACROSS COMMUTER SAMPLE

ASK GROUPS 8 (COMMUTERS), 9 AND 11 ONLY

Q.10 How long is your commute on the train?

Under 30 minutes	1
Over 30 minutes	2

RECRUIT A MIX OF THOSE WITH COMMUTES OF LESS THAN AND MORE THAN 30 MINUTES

ASK ALL LEISURE USERS

Q.11 Have you made a journey on South West Trains for leisure purposes in the last month?

Yes 1
No 2 CLOSE

Q.11a How many times a year do you make leisure journeys using South West Trains?

At least every month or two 1 RECRUIT AS FREQUENT LEISURE USER
A few times a year 2 RECRUIT AS OCCASIONAL LEISURE USER
Fewer than 3 times each year 3 CLOSE

Q.11b Which stations do you start and end your journey?

START _____

END _____

PLEASE ENSURE WE RECRUIT A MIX OF STARTING STATIONS – NOT ALL RESPONDENTS TO BE STARTING / ENDING AT ONE STATION

Q.11c Which days of the week do you tend to make leisure journeys?

Monday 1
Tuesday 2
Wednesday 3
Thursday 4
Friday 5
Saturday 6
Sunday 7

Q.11d What time of the day do you tend to make leisure journeys?

Morning 1
Afternoon 2
Evening 3

GROUPS 7, 10, 12

ENSURE A MIX OF FREQUENCIES, STATIONS, DAYS AND TIMES IN ALL GROUPS AT 11a, 11b, 11c and 11d

GROUP 14

ENSURE A MIX OF FREQUENT AND OCCASIONAL LEISURE USERS AT 11a

GROUP 8

ENSURE A MIX OF DIFFERENT DAYS AND TIMES OF TRAVEL AT 11c AND 11d

ASK ALL BUSINESS USERS

Q.12 Have you made a journey on South West Trains for business purposes in the last six weeks?

Yes 1
No 2 CLOSE

Q.12a How many times a year do you make leisure journeys using South West Trains?

3 or more times a year 1
Fewer than 3 times a year CLOSE

Q.12b Which stations do you start and end your journey?

START _____

END _____

Q.12c Which days of the week do you tend to make business journeys?

Monday 1
Tuesday 2
Wednesday 3
Thursday 4
Friday 5
Saturday 6
Sunday 7

Q.12d What time of the day do you tend to make business journeys?

Morning 1
Afternoon 2
Evening 3

GROUPS 2 & 13

ENSURE A MIX OF STATIONS, DAYS AND TIMES IN BOTH GROUPS AT 12b, 12c and 12d

ASK ALL

Q.11 Do you have any of these disabilities?

- Vision impairment
- Hearing impairment
- Mobility Difficulties
- Learning difficulties

YES 1

NO 2 **CLOSE**

Write in : _____

DEPTH 1-6
PLEASE RECRUIT A MIX OF DISABILITIES OVER THE DEPTHS

ASK ALL

Q.12 Which of the following statements do you agree with?

		Agree	Disagree
1	I enjoy meeting and talking to new people		
2	I am confident when talking with strangers		
3	I enjoy giving my opinions about different topics to other people		
4	I enjoy listening to other people’s point of view		
5	I think of myself as creative and imaginative		
6	I would describe myself as a people person		
7	I’m not shy or scared of being in the limelight		
8	I like to express my opinion when it is different than other people’s opinions		
9	If asked to describe something, I can usually do it in detail		

ALL MUST AGREE WITH AT LEAST 4 STATEMENTS

Q.13 And what is the occupation of the chief income earner in your household?

- Working Full Time 1
- Working Part Time 2
- Non Working 3
- Retired 4
- Student 5

Occupation

Industry

MANUAL/NON MANUAL/SKILLED/SEMI SKILLED/UNSKILLED

CIE QUALIFICATIONS (e.g. Apprenticeship, Degree, Professional etc.)

WRITE IN.....

Q.14 CODE SOCIAL CLASS BASED ON CIE OCCUPATION (CIRCLE BELOW)

A B C1 C2 D E

RECRUIT A MIX OF SEG ACROSS COMMUTER AND LEISURE GROUPS

Q.15 Are you willing to be contacted again for Market Research purposes?

- YES 1
- NO 2

PLEASE ASK THIS QUESTION TO ENSURE THAT WE ARE ADHERING TO THE DATA PROTECTION ACT IN THE EVENT OF NEEDING TO RE-CONTACT THE RESPONDENT AGAIN FOR MARKET RESEARCH.

PERMITTED METHODS OF RECRUITMENT

- Telephone freefind ✓
- Telephone snowballing * x
- Door to door ✓
- In street, face to face ✓
- From lists x

- ENSURE THAT ALL RESPONDENTS ARE INFORMED AT THE TIME OF RECRUITMENT THAT THEY WILL BE AUDIO RECORDED FOR LATER ANALYSIS.
- THE GROUPS MAY BE HELD IN A SPECIALIST VIEWING FACILITY WITH A 2 WAY MIRROR BEHIND WHICH CLIENTS MAY BE OBSERVING. THE DISCUSSION WILL BE VIDEO RECORDED.
- THESE RECORDINGS WILL ONLY BE USED FOR MARKET RESEARCH PURPOSES AND AT NO TIME WILL THEIR DETAILS BE PASSED ONTO A THIRD PARTY.

- IF RESPONDENTS WISH TO BRING A MOBILE PHONE WITH THEM, IT MUST BE SWITCHED OFF DURING THE GROUP DISCUSSION.
- IF RESPONDENTS REQUIRE GLASSES TO READ OR WATCH TV THEY MUST BRING THEM TO THE GROUP.

COMPLETE ALL RESPONDENT DETAILS IN CLEAR CAPITAL LETTERS AND INCLUDE THE STD TELEPHONE CODE.

Name

Address

.....

.....

Post Code

Telephone No. (STD Code)

Mobile No.

PLEASE AIM TO GET A MOBILE NUMBER.

CHECK INDIVIDUAL QUOTA AND RECRUIT STRICTLY ACCORDING TO INSTRUCTIONS.

INTERVIEWERS DECLARATION

I CERTIFY THAT THIS INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED WITH A PERSON PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN TO ME AND THE INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED ACCORDING TO THE PROVISIONS OF THE **MARKET RESEARCH SOCIETY'S 'CODE OF CONDUCT'** AND THE BRIEFING INSTRUCTIONS FROM VIEWPOINT

INTERVIEWERS SIGNATURE:

DATE:

Station specifics

Larger station examples

Based on views expressed during the research, major stations on the network seem mostly to be adequate to meet most needs of users. However, none of the stations discussed performs well in all areas, indicating room for improvement under the current or new franchise.

As explained above, it was not possible to ensure comprehensive coverage of the network or all major stations within the scope of this work. However, in order to help make findings specific to the South Western franchise rather than generic to the rail network, attitudes expressed towards certain stations used by participants in this project can be summarised as follows:

Southampton

- The recent refurbishment of the station is welcome among users
- However, the station is considered to be less welcoming and more hectic than other stations used
- Some issues were reported in relation to a perceived lack of staff helpfulness.

Guildford

- Access to station is considered to be excellent to the extent that it appears to have been planned and located with this as an objective
- The façade is considered to be modern as a result of renovation
- The platforms and underpass are felt to be less hospitable than the impression created from the outside
- There is some feeling that the facilities are poor for a station of this size.

Bournemouth

- The station is considered to be difficult to access by bus due to traffic congestion that is a frequent problem in the area
- The building is old but well maintained
- The facilities are thought to be poor for the size of the station
- The car park is large enough to meet the demand for spaces and also reasonably priced.

Salisbury

- Some have positive views regarding the refurbishment of the station
- However, some are unhappy about the fact that this work has made access and egress difficult due to the closure of one of the exits
- Parking is readily available at the station and is also inexpensive
- The station is generally felt to have good facilities.

Smaller station examples

The caveats expressed above in relation to major stations also apply to the following examples of passenger views of smaller stations on the network:

Fleet

- Considered to be a good example of a modern station
- Facilities available are appreciated by passengers
- Some claim it is difficult to park

- Others have experienced problems buying train tickets.

Gillingham (Dorset)

- Views among users tend to be mostly negative
- The station is considered to be a cold and dark environment
- The station is small but often crowded due to a local school.

Poole

- The car park is cheap so gets used by people using local shops so there are never enough spaces for passengers using the station
- There are lots of seats for passenger use when waiting for a train but facilities are felt to be poor otherwise
- Staff are readily available and helpful.

Worcester Park

- Users recognise that the station and bike storage facilities have recently been refurbished
- Facilities are felt to be available at peak times only and therefore cater primarily for commuters rather than leisure or business users at other times of the day
- The lift is often not working.