



# REACTING TO EXTREME WEATHER ON THE RAILWAY

## Qualitative Research Findings

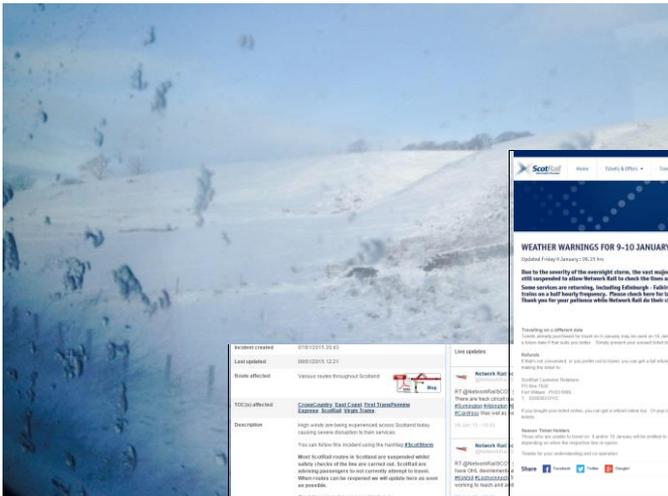
*March 2015*

# Before and during the research

Research was carried out 21<sup>st</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> January 2015 in:  
London, Exeter, Leeds, Manchester, Glasgow and Cardiff.

Extreme weather events before and during the research resulted in participants in Glasgow and Exeter drawing on recent experiences throughout the discussion

At the time of the research Scotland had experienced heavy snow



**WEATHER WARNINGS FOR 9-10 JANUARY**  
Updated Friday 9 January 10:25 AM

Due to the severity of the overnight snow, the vast majority of ScotRail services are still suspended to allow Network Rail to check the lines are safe for trains to run. Some services are returning, including Edinburgh - Fife, Glasgow - Dundee St. It is a high priority for us to get our services back on track as soon as possible. Thank you for your patience while Network Rail do their checks.

**Line updates**

**Network Rail**

- RT gthenswan@COE: ScotRail has been advised that the following services will be suspended for the duration of the weather warning.
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Before the research, Exeter had experienced landslips on the lines around Dawlish and Teignmouth



Image taken from:

<http://www.networkrail.co.uk/timetables-and-travel/storm-damage/>

# Defining extreme weather

For most, extreme weather is associated with severe or excessive seasonal weather

Mixed recent experience of extreme weather events

Mixed views regarding the reliability of weather forecasts



**Glasgow**  
Recall of Met Office warnings



**Exeter**  
Met Office (based locally) sometimes unreliable



<http://www.wordle.net/create>

Extreme weather is not perceived to be a key reason for delays

→ Some felt that it was a rare occurrence

Signalling problems

Trespasser on track

Staffing problems

Defective train

→ But not always aware/ informed of reasons for delays

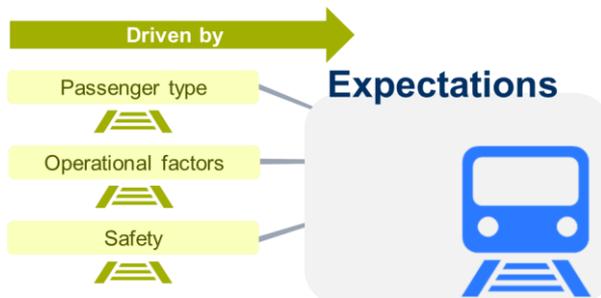
# Expectations (1)

Spontaneous expectations are high and possibly unrealistic

## Expectations



- Desire for normal service during extreme weather
- TOCs should plan to put enhanced service measures in place to maintain normal services



These high expectations are driven by:

- Passenger type and how essential passenger journeys are perceived to be
- Preference to travel by rail as often perceived to be more reliable than other modes (e.g. bus and tube)
- Low awareness/ spontaneous consideration of operational factors
- Low awareness/ spontaneous consideration of safety factors

# Expectations (2)

Once made aware of operational and safety factors passengers become more tolerant to the idea that a normal service may not be possible

## Expectations



- However, they still desire a normal service during extreme weather where possible
- Scope to improve information and influence tolerance

## Expectations



Information provision



Relationship with TOC



Influenced by

Influence these expectations by:

- Good information provision that is clear and reliable
- Positive relationship with TOC so that passenger believe in rationale for decisions made when planning for extreme weather

This will also help passengers make an informed choice about whether to attempt to travel

# Operational priorities

Frequency of service is considered the core priority for services during extreme weather

**1**

## FREQUENCY

- Turn up and get on a train
- Less likelihood of over-crowding
- Greater likelihood of getting a seat
- High expectations of frequency in London (10-15 minutes)

**2**

## PUNCTUALITY

- Prefer timetables/ knowing when a train will arrive
- Punctuality is more important where there is a low frequency service as used to relying on specific train times
- Travelling with children

**3**

## GETTING A SEAT

- More important for longer journeys, mobility impaired, those with strong dislike of over-crowding
- Typically less important for London commuters

“You know it’s going to be a bit chaotic, it’s better if you have more trains so you think okay, I won’t be able to get on that one, but I can get on the next one”  
London, Commuter

Overall low awareness of financial penalties. When prompted some participants felt that day-to-day TOCs are measured/ penalised on the basis of frequency or punctuality. However, most felt that financial penalties would be waived during extreme weather and therefore would not and should not impact on TOC decisions

Preferences focus on the ability to get on a train reinforcing that passengers want to be reassured about the **impact** to their journey – passengers want to know that they will be able make a journey within a reasonable timeframe, in reasonable comfort

# Timetable measures

Participants were asked to consider two options for timetabling when extreme weather is forecast

The full timetable runs with extended journey times, but few if any disruptions

or

A reduced timetable runs with less likelihood of delays or disruption but the potential for increased crowding

- Strong preference for this option
- Greater consistency
- Preference to get on with journey rather than wait (especially London)
- Assumption that delay is reasonable (e.g. not hours)

**DEMONSTRATES THAT TOC IS DOING THEIR BEST TO MAINTAIN NORMAL SERVICE**

- Reduced feels like you will be 'worse off'
- Strong dislike of over-crowding
- Feels less predictable and more uncomfortable
- Often this is what is delivered by TOCs during extreme weather

**WITHOUT EXPLANATION THIS CAN SUGGEST THAT TOC IS TRYING TO PUT PEOPLE OFF TRAVELLING**

Expectations strongly linked to relationship with TOC

- Initial reactions to timetable options focus on consistency (knowing when I can travel, and that I can travel within a reasonable timeframe) and comfort
- But relationship with TOC can generate cynicism about why changes to timetable are put in place

## Overall low awareness of the range of safety issues related to extreme weather

### FOCUS ON PERSONAL SAFETY

- Slipping/ falling at station
- Over-crowding/ cramped conditions
- Too hot/ too cold on train
- Angry passengers
- Very few spontaneous mentions of wider safety issues (e.g. derailment, trees on the line, landslips)



### NOT TOP OF MIND

- Recall of rail issues during extreme weather very limited
- Safety concerns considered rare/ rarely reported in the media
- Safety for cars much easier to recall/ considered more likely

### SAFE COMPARED TO OTHER MODES

- Rail considered safe during extreme weather
  - Large, heavy vehicles make them secure
- Although this may be:
- Weather dependent (in Glasgow high winds seen as risk to train derailment/ landslips)
  - Dependent on where weather is e.g. buses may be able to avoid flooded areas

Low awareness of safety factors mean that these are not currently factored into passenger expectations

The following information needs were identified

Accurate &  
Consistent

Informative  
& Clear

Up-to-date  
& Timely

Believable

Accessible

Tailored

# TRANSPORT FOCUS RECOMMENDATIONS

# Maintaining a normal service

Recognising passengers' desire for a normal service during extreme weather and to avoid the risk of being – or being seen to be – overcautious, the rail industry should:

- Put forward proposals for Control Period 6 (2019-2024) to further **increase the rail network's resilience** to extreme weather
- Publicly **commit to run the full timetable** during extreme weather unless **safety** would be compromised or there is a strong likelihood that doing so would result in severe disruption
- Develop means of 'route proving' lines that do not rely on manual inspection at first light. **Delaying start of service** until 11am attracts strong negative reaction from passengers. There is a big difference between the message "no trains until 11am because there *are* trees across the track" and "no trains until 11am while we see *if* there are trees across the track". The industry should strive hard to run trains from the normal start of service on all unaffected routes.

# Passenger Information

This research underlines the importance of good passenger information in allowing passengers to make informed decisions during extreme weather, including about whether or not to travel at all. The need for the National Task Force 40 actions to be delivered as quickly and as fully as possible across the industry is clear. Transport Focus's recommendations about information during extreme weather are:

- That train companies should be **transparent** about the reasons for running fewer trains, extending the journey time, starting the service later etc. The industry must help passengers understand **why** the changes are necessary and what will be achieved by making them. It must help passengers trust that decisions are being made for legitimate reasons and that rail companies have their passengers' interests at heart
- That details of any **temporary timetable** should be provided **as far in advance as possible** – ideally 24 hours, but certainly no later than 4pm the day before. If passengers, in particular commuters, can head home the day before knowing about tomorrow's trains they have the chance to re-plan. If this is currently impossible to achieve, the industry must increase the agility of its train planning system and processes
- That train companies make **latest route by route information** available prominently, providing both the current service status *and* a **forward view**. Industry systems are generally set up to report what is happening now, not to provide advice about the service to expect later or tomorrow. And yet passengers, aware that weather forecasters are warning of travel disruption, want to find out if they will be affected. In these situations guidance about what to expect tomorrow is vital, including – if it is the case – reassurance that a full service is planned and disruption is not anticipated.