



The train and my seat

Insights from HS2 online panel



Task:

- Can you think of any specific occasions/stations where you have found the boarding process particularly easy/difficult? Which station/ train was this, and why was it easy/difficult?
- What changes would you suggest to make the boarding process quicker and easier?
- What makes it easy to board the train and get to your seat, and what makes it difficult?
- Please think about ascending/climbing onto the train and getting to your seat after boarding.

Task 15, posted 15/08/2014

Barriers to the boarding process



Where to go?

- Which platform and how?
- How do I get there?



Congestion

- Crowding on platform.
- Competition for door.
- Congestion in aisles.



Boarding

- Large gaps, high steps.
- Looking after children.
- Mobility challenges.
- Lifting luggage.



Finding seat

- Locating reserved seat.
- Finding unoccupied seat.
- Disputes.



Luggage

- Storing luggage.
- Manoeuvring with luggage.
- Being blocked by luggage.

1

Not knowing where to go

- Not knowing where to go is one of the most common challenges, made worse by:
 - Platforms announced in final minutes before boarding
 - Last minute platform alterations.
 - No step-free access.
 - New platform is hard to find.



“One of my pet hates is that you wait for the platform to be announced and then it is a free for all as everyone runs to the platform to get a seat on the train...it seems to be every man for himself. It is very annoying when you are at a platform waiting for a train and at the last minute they announce there is a change of platform and it is a mad dash to get over to the new platform!! If you knew you had a seat there would be no need for this mad panic.”
(Leisure, Birmingham, 51-60)

“There are so many last minute platform changes causing passengers to do a quick last minute U-turn and run for the train; there is rarely a graceful and serene boarding process. In most major London terminals people do not know their platform until 10-15mins before it arrives; this causes panic and traffic of people heading the same way.”
(Commuting, Nottingham, 18-30)

“We are all kept waiting. Passengers champing at the bit to get on and it's really stressful. If you hang back you may not get a seat - sometimes I don't know what train I can get due to work commitments so can't book a seat. Watch the stress-o-meter rise!!!!”
(Business, London, 51-60)

transportfocus 

2

Congestion

- Lack of space and passenger behaviour (not letting passengers off first or sitting on aisle seats) cause congestion on platforms, at doors and in aisles. Ways to tackle it:

Controlled boarding



- Platform markings and boarding zones.
- Boarding in sequence.
- Announcements asking passengers to wait.

Efficient entrances



- Separate doors for entry and exit.
- More doors – by each pair of seats?
- Whole side of train opens.

More space



- Roomier platforms.
- Wider doors.
- Wider aisles.

3

Boarding

- Easy boarding is crucial. Problems are encountered when boarding involves a high step or large gap. It is a struggle especially for people with luggage, pushchairs and children, wheelchair users and elderly or less mobile passengers. There was also a plea from those in heels!

*"Minimal gap between the train and platform meaning people roll their cases on rather than having to lift them when boarding and for easy wheelchair access."
(Commuting, Birmingham, 31-40)*

Passengers want:

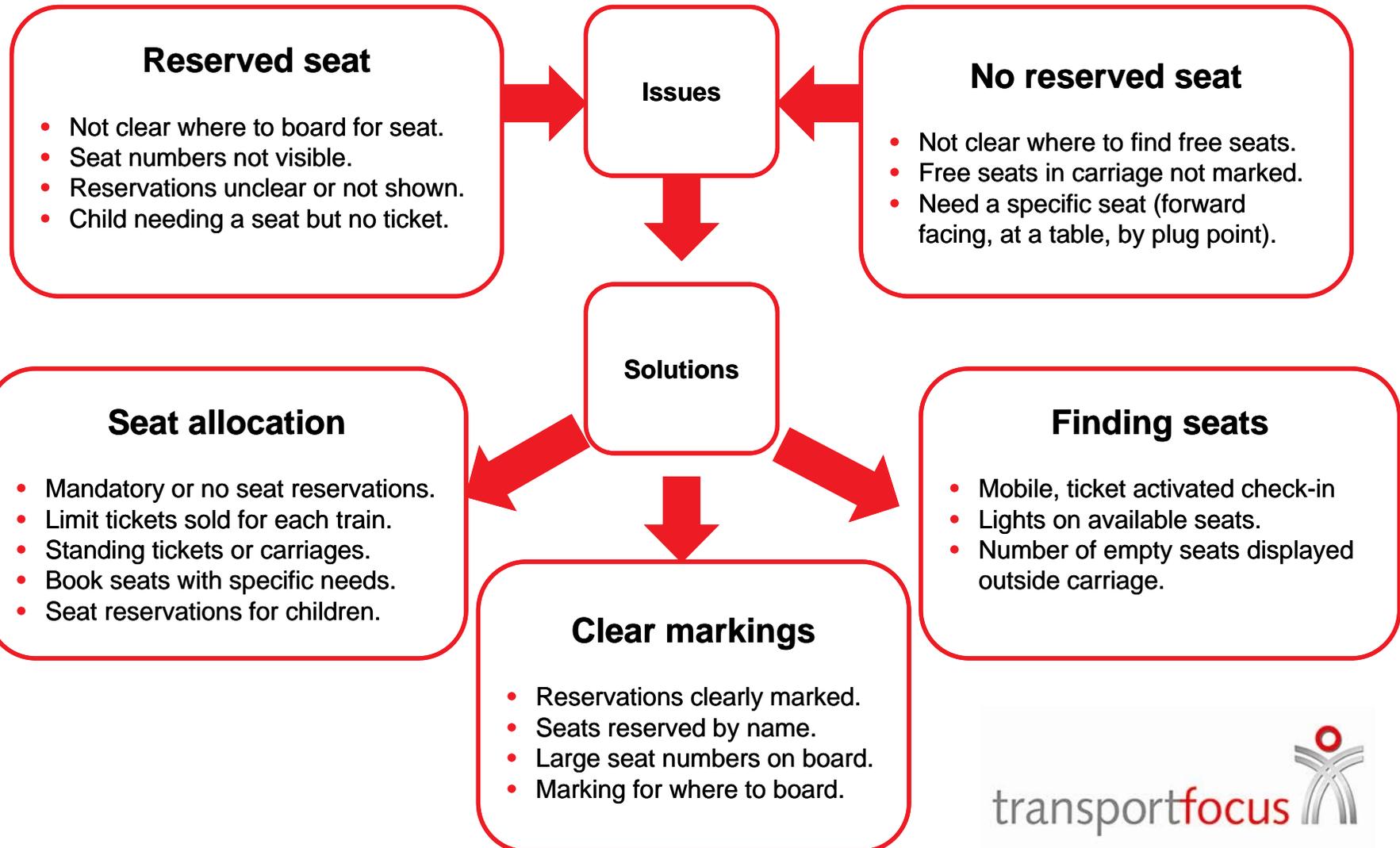
Step free access with a minimal gap between train and platform.

*"I dislike disembarking at New Street, there is quite a large gap and high step down to the platform. My son can only just climb aboard on his own. When it's very busy and people are pushing I worry about him falling through the gap! It would be better for accessibility if the train entrance is level with the platform so that wheelchairs can be wheeled on directly, as can pushchairs."
(Business, Nottingham, 31-40)*

"Trying to get a double buggy on and off trains is difficult enough but when some of the trains arriving at Liverpool Central Station stop with a large gap, it is virtually impossible to get the buggy off the train safely unless another passenger is kind enough to help you." (Leisure, Liverpool, 41-50)

4

Finding a seat



5

Luggage

- Finding a place to store luggage slows down boarding and creates bottlenecks.
- Bags are often left blocking doors and aisles or placed on aisle seats.
- Luggage piled on top of others slows down removal and exit from the train.
- Passengers find it difficult to manoeuvre luggage down narrow aisles.

"It's fine when just on a day trip but with heavy and oversized bags it's difficult to get on and off without bashing against other people or without injuring yourself. There are often bags on top of yours by the time it comes to getting off." (Leisure, Nottingham, 31-40)

"Sometimes my suitcase size isn't really catered for, I have to leave it at wider point of the carriage and don't have it in my line of vision. Getting on when everyone has a case too is a mission, scraped ankles, no regard for the older people." (Business, London, 51-60)

"The train fills up with people so by the time you get to Manchester you find that the aisles and seats are full of 40KG bags and you have to climb over everything and everybody to get off the train. What would make the whole process of getting on and off a train easier is staff at the station who know how to play Jenga with bags and people. When you don't travel on trains regularly you need someone to say there is space between the back to back seats or your bike can go in the space behind the driver." (Business, Liverpool, 41-50)

The experience of a wheelchair user

*"Where to start?!? It's *always* difficult! No two trains are alike, that's what makes train travel such a nightmare, there is no such thing as a standard wheelchair space, and the huge variations are *really* difficult to cope with. On several occasions I have been forced to park across the door. I have had people use me as a leaning post or climb across me to get in or out of the train. Wheelchair spaces vary in roominess and location. Just getting to the space from the external door is difficult due to the narrowness of corridor and the sharp turn to get from door to carriage or having to turn completely around because the space faces the exit. There is very rarely enough room to accomplish this easily and once you reach the wheelie space, there is often a fixed table to contend with as well.*

*The *only* easy experience I've had was on a Virgin train. The wiggle room was spacious and the table folded up against the wall to allow access. It was, as usual, impossible to turn the chair to get to the loo, although the loo door was retractable. That's one other aspect of train travel for wheelies: if you're not able to get out of the chair unaided and stagger to it, there is *no way* to go to the loo.*

*So what would make it easier? Firstly, enough space on the platforms so my railway assistant can get the ramp in place without being trampled. I usually tell them just to wait until everyone else is on board but this still requires somewhere to park whilst waiting. Standardisation in *all* trains so that I know what I have to contend with before boarding and thoughtful placing of the wheelchair space. Preferably *not* involving a 360 degree turn, with enough space to get in and out of it, and a foldup table-top to make it easier still. Actually, the easiest way for a wheelie to park would be with the chair back to the external carriage wall, thus allowing egress in either direction (depending on carriage configuration), and making getting to the loo a possibility. OK, the carriages would probably have to be a bit wider to accommodate this, but I'm sure a clever designer could accomplish it.*

And this presupposes the platform I need is accessible, with no stairs or lengthy detours. And now you know why travelling by train as a wheelie is usually the last resort." (Leisure, Glasgow, 51-60)

Task:

- How important is the way the train looks from the exterior? Does a train's outward appearance affect your experience?
- How would you like HS2 to look from the exterior?
- Please give examples of any trains that you find visually appealing or unappealing (and why), including at least one photo.

Task 17, posted 29/08/2014

“It’s the inside that counts”



- For most, the exterior is secondary to the interior look and feel. However, HS2 quality should flow throughout the entire business model, including the exterior.
- Some saw the outside simply as a shell to protect the inside, of negligible importance given minimal time is spent looking at it. Others felt the first sight of a train set the tone and could alter their expectations of the journey for better or worse.
- Virgin Pendolino trains cited as the model in Britain that exudes positivity.

*“Although the interior is more important for me, the exterior of the train can set the expectation of the journey. There’s nothing more disappointing than walking past all the shiny Virgin Pendolinos to find a rusty old dirty two carriage cart waiting for you which looks like it needs a push to get it going. ”
(Leisure, Nottingham, 31-40)*

“From the outside of the train, my expectations and perceptions of the journey and how I will feel on the train will alter (no air-con, noisy, cramped).” (Leisure, Nottingham, 31-40)

“There is nothing like a gleaming shiny train to put you in a good frame of mind for the journey. However the comfort and appearance of the interior is practically more important” (Commuter, London, 61-70)

Passenger expectations of exterior

- In the UK, Virgin “Pendolino” train was seen as the ‘holy grail’ of design. Passengers felt the exterior was finished to a higher standard than other trains used currently. This created trust, confidence, pleasure and excitement.

distinctive high-quality-finish minimal memorable
modern understated streamline
 clean muted-colours streamlined exciting different
 well-maintained aerodynamic
 luxurious futuristic simple smart robust
sleek



“I like the look of the Virgin trains as they are always very sleek, I feel as though they will get me to my destination quicker.”
(Leisure, Birmingham, 51-60)

“I definitely feel better about travelling on a Virgin train than some other trains so I guess the appearance does have an effect on perceptions and attitudes.”
(Business, Birmingham, 51-60)

Passengers select a futuristic look for HS2



Different by design

- Passengers want HS2 to reflect its heritage.
- Proud to be designed and 'made' in Britain.
- Have character and not be generic.
- Create excitement and anticipation.



"Is there a way in the exterior design to give them each a personality, such as a different colour or name. If you get the train all the time it might make me chuckle if my train had a small difference. I do smile when I see the X men train in Manchester." (Commuter, Sheffield, 18-30)

Task:

- How would you expect seating to be allocated on HS2?
- Should seat reservations be mandatory, or should you be able to board the train without a reservation? Should standing be allowed?
- Would you want to be able to reserve a seat in specific areas? (e.g. quiet areas, family areas, eating/drinking areas). What if your requirements changed after making your reservation?

Task 27, posted 07/11/2014

Mandatory seat reservations

- There is an overwhelming desire for seat reservations to be mandatory on HS2 for longer distance, business and leisure journeys. Standing should not be allowed.

“As for standing?? No way, its bad enough on some trains, personally think its outrageous when people pay a full fare and then don't have a seat. Its undignified and unheard of in most countries. On a high quality train it really must not happen” (Business, Birmingham, 51-60)

“Oh yes, I would absolutely expect seating to be allocated. Apart from anything else, surely this would be the safest option for a high speed train? ” (Leisure, Leeds, 18-30)

“Yes I think reservations should be mandatory, and clearly displayed on the ticket and the seat” (Business, Liverpool, 41-50)

- Commuters are more open to the idea of unreserved seating and even standing:
 - For regular short journeys, finding a designated seat could be laborious.
 - Frustrating if could not board a train because there were no seats left.

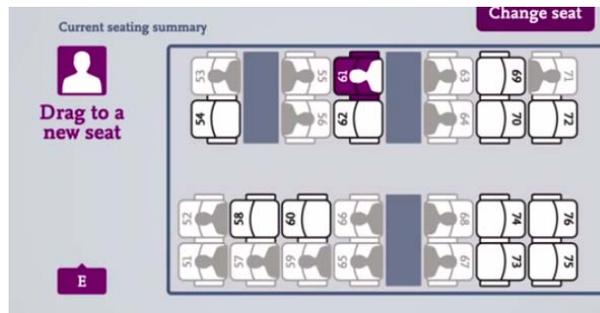
“I find seat reservations are sometimes more of a faff than not reserving a specific seat. I get quite anxious about finding the right carriage and right seat.” (Business, Birmingham, 51-60)

“I have a massive hatred for reservations on commuter trains. No one sits in their designated seat and everyone dances around the reserved seats not sure whether they can sit down.” (Business, Birmingham, 51-60)

“This is a hard question. People would get annoyed if they can't get on a train because they would need to stand (which they may be happy to do).” (Business, Birmingham, 51-60)

My seat, my choice

- When reserving a seat passengers want and expect to choose their exact seat as they can on airlines and on Virgin Trains East Coast.
- At the very least, options should allow them to choose a type of seat:
 - Type of carriage e.g. quiet, eating, family.
 - Direction of travel.
 - Window or aisle seat.
 - Table or airline style.
 - Amenities close by, such as toilets, food, doors.
- Passengers want the flexibility to amend seat reservations should travel plans change and some would be prepared to pay an admin fee for doing so.



Benefits of reserved seating:

- Increased safety.
- Easy access up and down aisles.
- Easy boarding and disembarkment.
- No one invading personal space.
- No one “stealing” reserved seat.

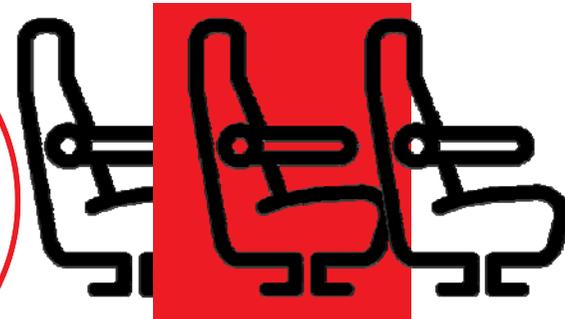
A desire for standing

- Standing carriages were suggested, particularly by commuters. Safety permitting, these carriages would have rails to hold on to but no seats.
- Should standing not be viable, regular commuters wanted the same seat every time to save time searching for it. Alternatively, if the seat were randomly allocated upon arrival, they could save time pre-booking seats.



£££

Standing tickets should be significantly discounted versus seated tickets.



Task:

- Passengers were asked to watch a video which showed seats that could be 'switched' around so that the direction of travel could be chosen by the passenger. Having watched the video, what do you think about the seats? What do you think the benefits would be and do you have any concerns about them?

Task 32, posted 16/01/2015

The seats sparked interest...

- Almost unanimously, passengers approved of seats that allow the passenger to decide which direction they face during travel.
- Seen as a genuinely innovative idea, the best aspects of the seats were:
 - Families or groups are able to sit together and face each other.
 - Can always face the direction of travel (to reduce travel sickness).



*"Overall though, innovative, and exactly the idea that this premium service should be coming up with."
(Commuter, London, 61-70)*

*"I hate travelling backwards as I get motion sickness easily so for me, this idea is a great one."
(Business, London, 51-60)*

*"Yeah this is a good idea, for those that want to sit together or to change to the direction the train is travelling in..."
(Leisure, Liverpool, 31-40)*

Concerns: safety and practicality

- Passengers want more information about who would operate the seats (passengers or staff) and reassurances over safety and ease of use.

Safety

- Fingers trapped operating the seats.
- Children 'messing around' with seats.
- Seats become unstable, wear and tear.
- Seats become 'jammed'.

Practicality

- Do not look comfortable.
- Likened to 'flip seats' on London tubes.
- Could cause friction among passengers (reclining seats).
- What if people sit in opposite directions?

"Disadvantages would be: kids possibly messing about with them, which might annoy others, accidents could happen with trapped fingers." (Leisure, Liverpool, 31-40)

"Concern would be the mechanism jamming and getting stuck half way which would render the seat useless." (Commuter, Birmingham, 31-40)

"Children could spend many a happy hour (for them that is) shifting the seats to and fro - I wouldn't fancy two hours of listening to that ratchet clicking every two seconds." (Business, London, 51-60)