

West Midlands rail franchise consultation Transport Focus response

March 2016



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1. Transport Focus

Transport Focus is the independent public body set up by the Government to protect the interests of Britain's rail passengers, England's bus and tram passengers outside London, and coach passengers in England on scheduled domestic services. Since March 2015 we have also represented the interests of users of the strategic road network. We are an independent body funded by the Department for Transport (DfT).

Our mission is to get the best deal for passengers. With a strong emphasis on evidence based campaigning and research, we ensure that we know what is happening on the ground. We use our knowledge to influence decisions on behalf of passengers and we work with the industry, passenger groups and government to secure journey improvements.

Transport Focus appreciates the open consultation on the future West Midlands franchise, particularly the efforts to engage directly with individual passengers as well as wider stakeholders.

2. Introduction

Transport Focus welcomes the opportunity to provide a rail passengers' perspective as the specification for the new West Midlands franchise is developed. When the requirements of the franchise are established, it is vital that the needs of passengers using and paying for rail services are placed squarely at the heart of the contract.

We are pleased to have engaged with the Department for Transport's Rail Executive (RE) and West Midlands Rail (WMR) from an early stage in the West Midlands franchise replacement process. We have used discussions to highlight key passenger issues and the findings of our research on a range of subjects.

This formal consultation response draws on three rich seams of franchise specific data. Firstly, it combines knowledge and understanding drawn from passenger reports of their current journeys on London Midland services with information on passenger priorities for improvement. Read together these two complementary studies provide a unique perspective on passenger needs from the franchise and provide hard evidence to inform the decisions to be made for the future.

In addition, we also reference the findings of qualitative research into the views of London Midland passengers that we undertook in autumn 2014. More generally, we cite findings from our wider research into a range of issues that are important to passengers.

Our research, which will be detailed in further sections of this response, highlights the central importance to passengers of value for money, capacity and punctuality. These core needs must be the top requirements in the specification for the next franchise.

Our research into passenger understanding of, and desire for involvement in, the franchise process led to our emphasis on *Passenger Power!* and a call for more recognition of the passenger within the franchising system. Recent announcements of franchise policy have made welcome commitments to a greater emphasis on the quality of the passenger experience and enhanced arrangements for engagement and communication with customers. It is important these promises are brought to life in the specification for the next franchise and that passengers can see these ideals manifest in the services they receive.

It is vital that, throughout its duration, the franchise remains responsive to changing passenger needs. This means not only that there must be a clear understanding of passenger requirements at the outset but that there is an ongoing emphasis on consultation and engagement with stakeholders and a set of output measures that reflect passenger satisfaction.

There is an important role for the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) in providing direct feedback from passengers using the services.

Transport Focus is committed to the promotion of passenger interests in the future decisions on the West Midlands franchise. We will continue to work closely with RE, WMR and with potential bidders for the operation, to ensure that services address both current and evolving needs throughout the contract term.

2.1 Franchise consultation response

In this response we consider consultation questions for which we have relevant information and appropriate evidence of passenger needs and aspirations. We also provide a commentary on other significant issues which we believe should be addressed within the West Midlands franchise specification and final contract.

Transport Focus is adopting a strategic approach to this response, which focuses largely on higher level issues. Passengers and stakeholders will all have their own experiences and specific aspirations which they will want considered in future plans. It is important that RE, WMR and the franchise bidders listen carefully to the views expressed by those whose lives are impacted by decisions about the future of the franchises and the day-to-day operations which result from this.

3. Passenger research and implications for the franchise

3.1 The Transport Focus evidence base

Transport Focus is committed to underpinning our work to get the best deal for passengers with a solid evidence base: we have a considerable body of research on matters that are important to passengers. Much of this is directly relevant to the specification for the next West Midlands franchise.

In this section we highlight the findings of our investigations into passengers' priorities for improvement and trust in the rail industry. We also draw on NRPS data for information about the current experience on the franchise. Read together these complementary studies provide a unique perspective on passenger needs from the franchise and provide hard evidence to inform the decisions to be made for the future.

We also highlight the key findings from our recent qualitative research among London Midland passengers.

Other research is cited as applicable within following sections.

3.2 Rail passengers' priorities for improvement 2014¹

This 2014 study of passenger priorities shows that the top four requirements of passengers travelling on London Midland's services directly reflect those of both the West Midlands and the national sample overall.

The priorities in table 1 are shown as an index averaged on 100. An index of 300 is three times as important as the average and an index score of 50 is half as important as the average. So in table 1 we can see that, for London Midland's passengers, the top priority of 'the price of train tickets offers better value for money' is more than four and a half times as important as the average.

This information can also be shown graphically to illustrate just how much the relative importance varies between the factors. (See figure 1 below).

'Passengers always able to get a seat on the train' is over three and a half times more important than the average. 'Trains sufficiently frequent at the times I wish to travel' is more than twice as important as the average.

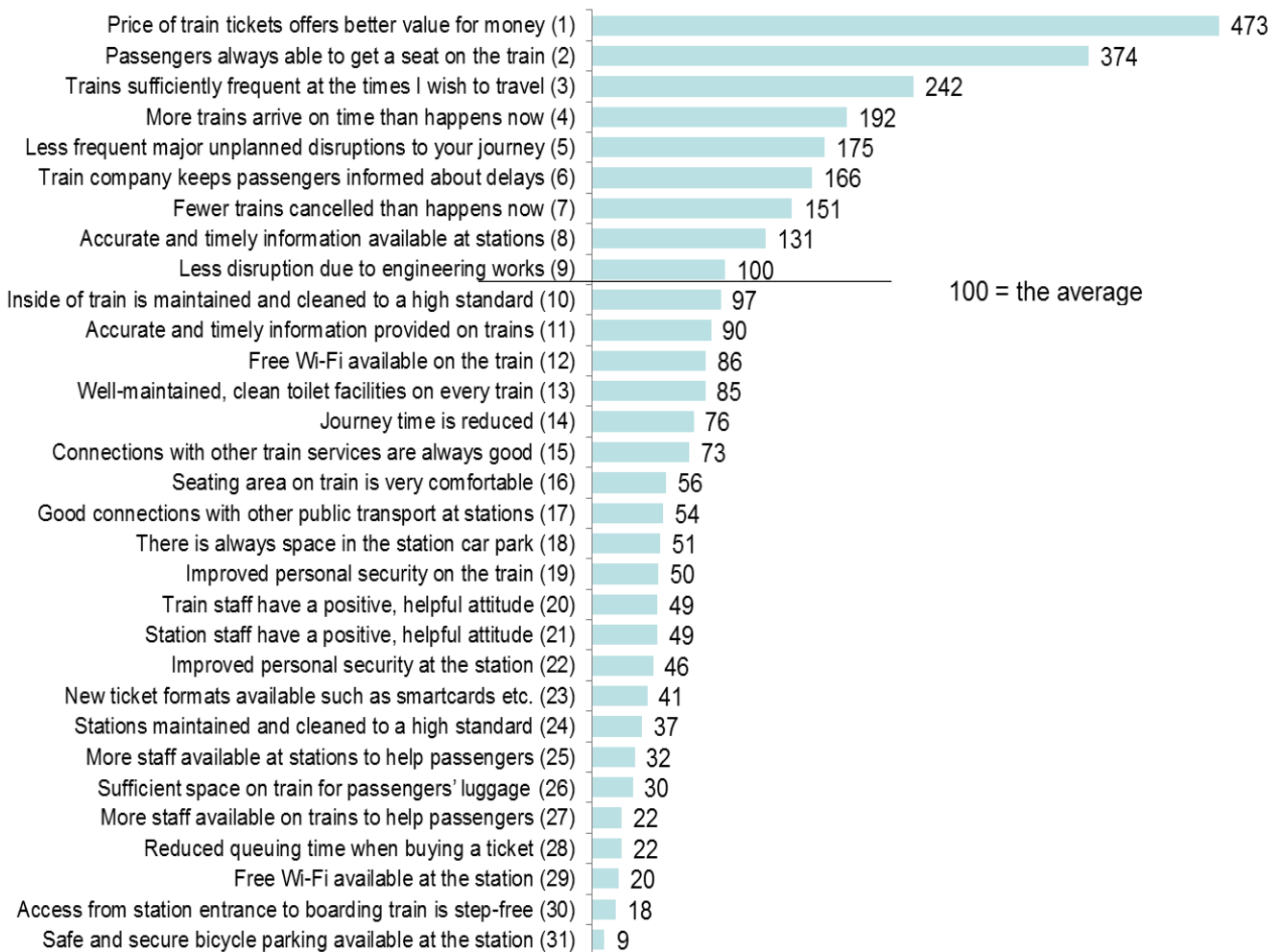
The next group of important priority factors also feature what can be regarded as core elements of service. Passengers want improvements in punctuality and reliability, fewer disruptions or cancellations and good information about their services.

¹ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/rail-passengers-priorities-for-improvements-october-2014>

Table 1 Passenger priorities for improvement: comparison of London Midland Trains, West Midlands and Great Britain

	London Midland		West Midlands		GB	
Price of train tickets offers better value for money	473	1	484	1	494	1
Passengers always able to get a seat on the train	374	2	455	2	367	2
Trains sufficiently frequent at the times I wish to travel	242	3	239	3	264	3
More trains arrive on time than happens now	192	4	172	4	178	4
Less frequent major unplanned disruptions to your journey	175	5	156	6	161	6
Train company keeps passengers informed about delays	166	6	161	5	163	5
Fewer trains cancelled than happens now	151	7	134	7	136	7
Accurate and timely information available at stations	131	8	129	8	132	8
Less disruption due to engineering works	100	9	89	11	90	13
Inside of train is maintained and cleaned to a high standard	97	10	101	9	93	11
Accurate and timely information provided on trains	90	11	87	12	92	12
Free Wi-Fi available on the train	86	12	78	14	97	10
Well-maintained, clean toilet facilities on every train	85	13	92	10	89	14
Journey time is reduced	76	14	87	13	105	9
Connections with other train services are always good	73	15	77	15	84	15
Seating area on train is very comfortable	56	16	63	16	59	17
Good connections with other public transport at stations	54	17	55	17	62	16
There is always space in the station car park	51	18	40	22	27	26
Improved personal security on the train	50	19	46	20	41	21
Train staff have a positive, helpful attitude	49	20	49	18	47	18
Station staff have a positive, helpful attitude	49	21	48	19	46	19
Improved personal security at the station	46	22	42	21	38	22
New ticket formats available such as smartcards etc.	41	23	36	24	45	20
Stations maintained and cleaned to a high standard	37	24	37	23	36	24
More staff available at stations to help passengers	32	25	30	26	29	25
Sufficient space on train for passengers' luggage	30	26	35	25	37	23
More staff available on trains to help passengers	22	27	21	27	20	28
Reduced queuing time when buying a ticket	22	28	19	28	20	29
Free Wi-Fi available at the station	20	29	17	29	24	27
Access from station entrance to boarding train is step-free	18	30	15	30	15	30
Safe and secure bicycle parking available at the station	9	31	8	31	10	31
Sample size	113		166		3559	

Figure 1 London Midland passengers' priorities for improvement – relative importance



This research provides a very clear picture of passengers' priorities for improvement. The two top priorities, by some considerable margin, are 'price of train tickets offers better value for money' and 'passengers always able to get a seat on the train'. The strong third priority for improvement, indexed at 242, is 'trains sufficiently frequent at the times I wish to travel'. And, if we consider the various factors related to punctuality, reducing cancellations and minimising disruption we can see that they also have a very high combined priority for improvement.

Summarising the findings, it is clear that the top priorities for improvement largely focus on the basic elements of the rail service – value for money, getting a seat, frequency, punctuality, managing delays and provision of information. This is not to say the remaining priorities are not important to the passenger experience, it is just that they are not as important to improve as the top ranking.

The research has sample sizes of 113 for London Midland and 166 for West Midlands within an overall GB pool of 3559. The database² contains a wealth of information which can be analysed in many ways to explore how priorities vary by demographic and journey purpose, amongst other things. We commend its use to RE and potential bidders to enable a detailed understanding of the aspirations of passengers to apply to the West Midlands network.

3.3 NRPS and drivers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction

The National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS), together with an analysis of the drivers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, is a comprehensive source of information about passenger perceptions of the current franchise. It can also be broken down to show variations across the three 'building block' groupings of rail services in the West Midlands.

Evidence from the NRPS reinforces the importance of punctuality and reliability as one of the highest priorities identified for the franchise.

Tables detailing the NRPS headline factor scores for London Midland and the three component building blocks are provided in Appendix 2. These include a comparison of scores with the sector or typology average and the typology best in class.

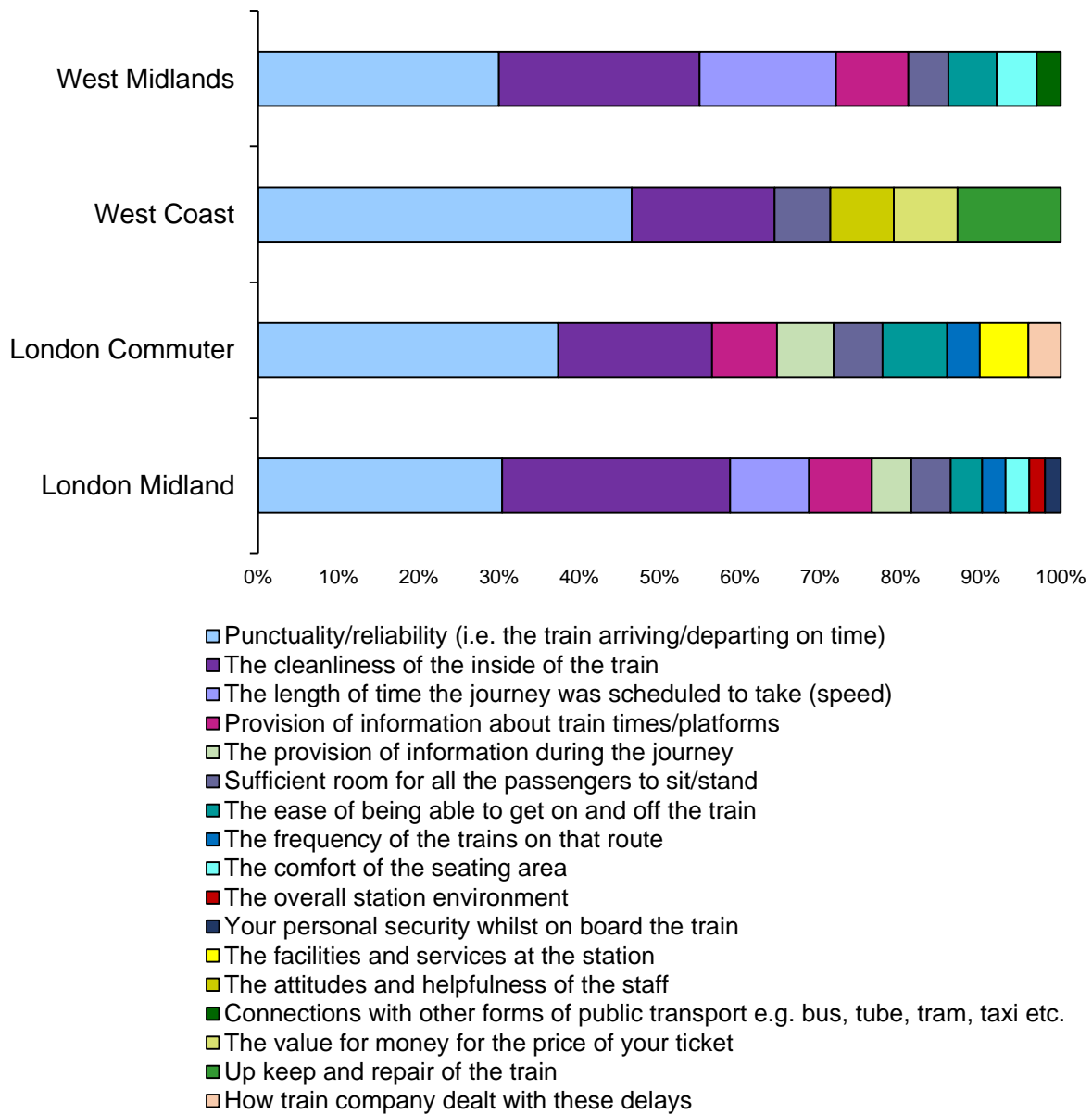
3.3.1 Drivers of satisfaction

Figure 2 shows the significance of punctuality and reliability as a driver of satisfaction for London Midland passengers at 31 per cent overall. It is a particularly strong factor for passengers on the West Coast at 47 per cent. It is also a factor on the London Commuter and West Midlands routes at 37 per cent and 30 per cent.

Another notable driver of satisfaction is 'the cleanliness of the inside of the train' at 29 per cent overall and important across all building blocks, particularly on West Midlands. Journey length is also a factor on West Midlands at 17 per cent, while 'the upkeep and repair of the train' is important on the West Coast route at 13 per cent. Factors relating to information at stations and on trains are both higher than the national average for London Midland passengers overall.

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

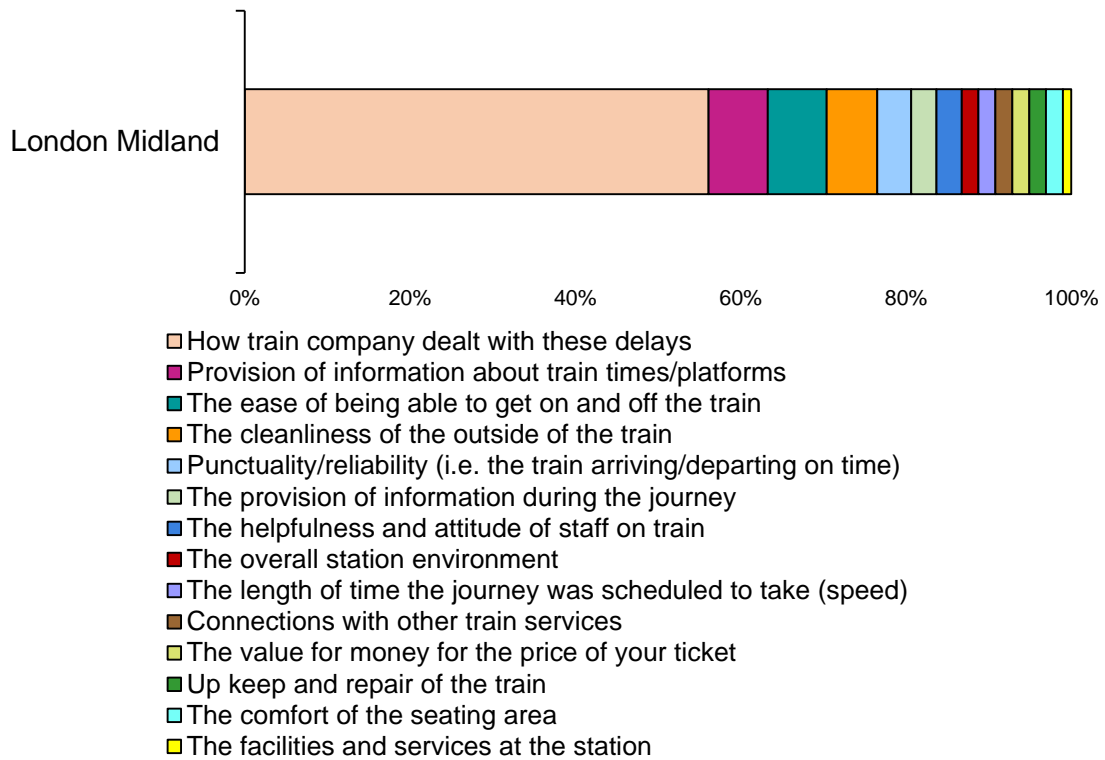
Figure 2 - Drivers of satisfaction, NRPS Spring 2015/Autumn 2015: London Midland and building blocks



3.3.2 Drivers of dissatisfaction

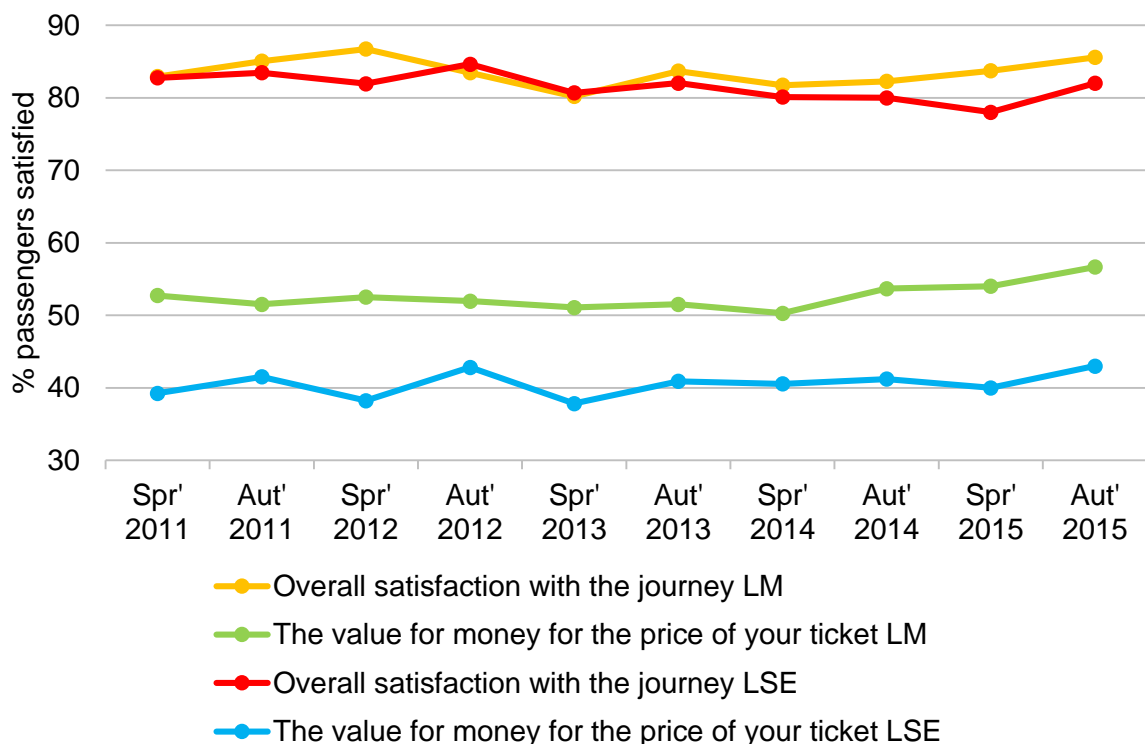
An analysis of the factors that drive passenger dissatisfaction also echoes the importance of key factors to passengers (figure 3). By far the most significant driver of dissatisfaction is ‘how well the train company dealt with delays’ at 55 per cent. Where delays are not dealt with well, passengers will be dissatisfied.

Figure 3 - Drivers of dissatisfaction, NRPS Spring 2015/Autumn 2015: West Midlands



3.3.3 Satisfaction with value for money and the overall journey

Figure 4 – London Midland and London and South East sector trends for value for money and satisfaction with overall journey, NRPS



A comparison between London Midland and the London and South East (LSE) sector shows similar overall satisfaction over several years (figure 4 above). However, in recent waves London Midland satisfaction has been slightly above that of the sector and has increased from 82 per cent in Autumn 2014 to 86 per cent in Autumn 2015

Scores for satisfaction with value for money are considerably lower for both London Midland and the sector. However, London Midland consistently scores significantly above the LSE sector average.

3.4 Qualitative research into passengers' experiences and aspirations for the future

In December 2014, as part of the preparatory work for the anticipated Direct Award to London Midland and to inform this subsequent franchise competition, Transport Focus undertook qualitative research³, on behalf of the DfT, to understand passengers' current experiences and their aspirations for the future of the franchise.

Key aspirations for improvement identified by the West Midlands research are reliability and punctuality and train service levels.

The findings in a number of important areas are detailed below.

Train reliability and punctuality:

- Passengers across the network report frequent delays and cancellations, especially commuters who often experience short delays of around 5-10 minutes.
- Some passengers have been left waiting as delayed trains 'skip' intermediate stations in order to make-up time.
- Poor weather and staff shortages are perceived to be frequent, often unacceptable, excuses for delays.
- Communication during disruption is considered poor.

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

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

³ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/london-midland-rail-franchise-passenger-research>

Train service level:

- Passengers report problems with overcrowding and difficulty moving through the train on many lines during peak hours. Their belief is the situation is worsening with nothing being done about it.
- Frequency is largely considered adequate as long as services are reliable. However, there are perceived to be too few services later at night and at the weekends and a lack of services during large scale events.

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

Value for money:

- The current service is considered to be ‘no frills’ and often chosen only because it is cheaper. Some passengers are willing to pay more for what they consider to be a better service from another operator.
- Passengers want to see simplified ticket choices, better communication of offers and compensation for shorter delays.

“You get what you pay for; it’s cheap as chips to go to London if you’re willing to stand during half the journey and stop at every station on the way.” Crewe group, Business/Leisure, Older

Customer service and staff:

- Staff are seen to be helpful and friendly but they are considered to lack up-to-date knowledge. During disruption they are not always able to provide adequate information about the problem or its impact.

“No one actually at the station can seem to tell you what’s going on, but the guy on Twitter, whoever it is, give him credit.” (Birmingham group, Commuter, Younger)

3.5 Passenger trust in the rail industry

In 2014 Transport Focus undertook a study to explore passengers’ relationship with the rail industry⁴. The main finding is that to improve passengers’ trust in the rail industry, train companies not only need to get the basic service right day-to-day, they need to put effort into building long-term relationships with their passengers.

Trust consists of three elements: service, relationship and judgement. Service elements affect day-to-day issues such as punctuality, reliability, helpfulness of staff and value for money. They are the foundations for building passengers’ trust.

⁴ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/passengers-relationship-with-the-rail-industry>

It is important to focus on relationship factors to build passenger trust once the service elements are in place. Some train companies have developed good relationships with their passengers. Communicating directly and proactively with passengers goes down well with them. Particular problem areas for communication identified by the research are confusion over ticketing options and when there are delays or cancellations. Communicating honestly, with integrity and transparency, can inspire trust.

Many train companies score well on the third trust element – judgement. They are seen to have high principles, a good reputation and show leadership. However, judgement does not contribute as much to trust as service and relationship.

For the next West Midlands franchise to build greater trust with passengers it is important to get the basic service right ahead of everything else. Then, building on closer relationships with their passengers is important. One way is through high quality communication. Passengers should feel that train companies are ‘on their side’.

3.6 Recommendation - top level priorities for the franchise

Analysis of the passenger priorities for improvement, drivers of satisfaction /dissatisfaction and the feedback from the passenger focus groups highlights a number of factors that should be top level priorities for the next West Midlands franchise to address. These are:

- value for money
- punctuality and reliability
- capacity and frequency
- effective management of any disruption, especially through information to passengers.

Attention should also be given to cleanliness inside trains, provision of accurate and timely information and, to build trust further, clear and open communication.

4. Response to consultation questions

Question area A – responsive to passengers' needs and aspirations

Question 1 – Use of the railway

Q1: Thinking of the journeys you make by train, or journeys you could make by train but where you decide to use an alternative transport mode instead:

- **what specific changes could be made to make the railway easier and more attractive to use for all; and**
- **why do you think these changes would help?**

Please provide your reasons why and details of the journeys you refer to where possible.

4.1 Cost and convenience

The findings from a number of studies into the views of infrequent or non-users of trains identify the generic issues that influence decisions regarding rail travel.

The DfT published an update to its Door to Door Strategy⁵ and identified four core areas for improvement that would make it easier and more convenient for people to make their whole journey by sustainable transport modes:

- improving the quality and availability of information
- making smart and integrated ticketing the norm
- improving connections at every stage of the journey
- enhancing transport facilities.

A Transport Focus review⁶ of various research studies identifies the key barriers to use of the train:

- perceived cost of the ticket
- perceived hassle of going by train
- assumption that the door to door journey (except for long distance journeys) would be longer
- concerns about punctuality and reliability, particularly if the journey involves a change of train.

Those who are not in the habit of using trains frequently tend to regard the need to plan journeys as a major disincentive and the fact that this is not a feature of many car journeys tends to remove much of the stress from travelling by this mode.

⁵ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/391159/dft-door-to-door-action-plan-3.pdf

⁶ Unpublished but available on request

Research carried out in the East Anglia⁷ area also identified various features that may help to encourage consideration of rail among non- and lapsed users, but concluded that the main challenge is likely to be entrenched mind-sets rather than network specific issues.

The features identified to encourage consideration of rail are:

- promote website planning tools
- 'try it for a day' free rail ticket
- ongoing walk-up deals
- integrated end-to-end journey packages
- staff presence – reassurance that there will be a visible/helpful staff presence at all times
- promotion of generic rail benefits.

“It wouldn't be just about staff presence it would be about knowing that their role is to intervene and keep you safe” (Cambridge group, Non/Lapsed User)

When put to the test most of the above perceptions can be challenged, as evidenced by Transport Focus research looking at how more people could be attracted to use the railway⁸. Passengers who were encouraged to give rail a try as part of the research found that the train was more reliable than envisaged, more comfortable and that, in some instances, their perceptions of high cost could be challenged.

The performance and reliability of the railway, and its comparison to other modes, also plays an influential role. If non-users are to be encouraged to make the shift from their current choice then focus must be given to performance on key factors. This is also vital for existing users in order that they continue to make rail their mode of choice.

Question 2a and 2b – Access and planning

Q2a: Do you use your nearest railway station? If you do not please let us know the reasons why.

Q2b: Thinking of your train journeys as a whole, how could we improve your experience of:

- **Finding information and planning your journey**
- **Accessing your railway station in an environmentally friendly way such as by walking, cycling, tram or bus**
- **Accessing your railway station by private car (including car parking and drop off areas)?**

⁷ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/rail-passengers-experiences-and-expectations-of-the-east-anglia-franchise-august-2015>

⁸ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/integrated-transport-perception-and-reality>

Please let us know the reasons why. If you are aware of any examples of particularly good or particularly poor connections between transport modes at stations, either within the franchise area or more widely please let us know including reasons why these are particularly good or poor.

4.2 Door-to-door journeys

4.2.1 Pre-journey planning

Passengers planning their journey will have different requirements depending on their individual situation and preferences. Pre-journey information should therefore be available in a wide variety of formats.

Websites need to be easy to navigate and kept up to date. Information about engineering works, replacement buses, cancellations or other disruption should be shown prominently to allow passengers to make informed choices when planning journeys. Contact centre services should have good local area and network knowledge to deal with enquiries.

Some passengers may prefer to speak to a member of staff at their local station for information. This option may offer the most reassurance, about both journey details and fares, to a passenger who is not a regular rail user or who is making an unfamiliar journey.

Journeys rarely begin and end at rail stations. A joined-up approach to offering information about other train operators, other public transport services, cycling or walking options, taxis and other relevant organisations will be welcomed by some passengers.

Research looking at how train companies use social media⁹ found that Twitter was seen as a useful channel for pushing information out to people. However, it was essential that this information could be filtered to suit individual requirements; passengers want a tailored solution rather than an overwhelming amount of detail that is not directly relevant to their journey.

Qualitative research amongst London Midland passengers found that the operator's Twitter account is considered useful, particularly during disruption.

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

Communication of delays and cancellations in advance of arrival at the station, for example through push notifications or text messages was one of the aspirations for improvement.

⁹ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/short-and-tweet-how-passengers-want-social-media-during-disruption>

4.2.2 Improving station access

Individual passengers and local stakeholders are best placed to give their experiences of specific stations and journeys. However, we are able to draw on evidence to comment on the overarching themes relevant to the network and passengers as a whole.

When passengers decide what mode of transport to take they are swayed by three overwhelming factors: how convenient will the journey be, how much will it cost and how long will it take¹⁰. This applies to the whole door-to-door journey. The way passengers access the station can affect both overall journey cost and time. If getting to the rail station becomes too inconvenient passengers will often choose to make their whole journey by car; adding congestion to the roads and to transport's carbon footprint.

The passenger growth anticipated for the West Midlands means increased attention will need to be given to how passengers are going to access and pass through stations throughout the life of the franchise.

In our qualitative research London Midland was seen as the go-to service for smaller rural stations that other operators do not stop at. This emphasises the importance of good, easy access to local stations and its influence on travel choices.

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

The same research indicated that some passengers don't think there are sufficient car parking spaces at stations or that they may be being taken up by non-users of the railway. More parking was identified as an area requiring improvement and, at larger stations, there was a desire for parking to be free.

NRPS scores for London Midland building blocks indicate a variation in satisfaction with different station access factors across the network¹¹. 'Connections with other forms of transport' scores lower than the sector average across each of the three building blocks. Satisfaction with 'facilities for car parking' is significantly lower on London Commuter and West Midlands routes than on the West Coast route. Satisfaction with 'facilities for cycle parking' is significantly lower for the West Midlands routes. This suggests there is scope for bidders to propose a range of different solutions and improvements to the door-to-door journey.

¹⁰ Door to door by public transport – improving integration between National Rail and other public transport services in Britain, June 2009 <http://www.cpt-uk.org/uploads/attachment/690.pdf>

¹¹ Appendix 2 shows scores for 'connections with other forms of public transport' and 'car parking'. Data for satisfaction with cycle parking is also available but needs to be treated with more caution as the sample sizes for these factors are smaller.

At some locations the solution to station access needs will be to improve public transport links and parking provision; but at others the solution will be more complex and could be more creative. With limited space for car parking at some stations, and the industry's desire to look at more sustainable options, Transport Focus is supportive of the use of Station Travel Plans. Local groups and Community Rail Partnerships should be involved in developing proposals to improve station access.

The specification should encourage commitment to station travel plan schemes, with rollout dispersed across the network and throughout the life of the franchise. The stations selected should not just be those with the highest footfall, as the 2011 Network RUS (Stations) demonstrated that congestion does not just occur at those stations with the highest number of passengers starting or ending their journeys.

The bidders should be able to demonstrate how they will work in partnership with local authorities and other agencies to improve accessibility to stations by all modes, including cycling and walking. Where identifiably beneficial schemes for passengers can be delivered by other partners, they should be encouraged and their future assured. The franchise should accommodate commitments to the future operation of any facilities provided.

Bidders might also be asked to explore the potential to develop 'virtual branch lines' using existing scheduled bus services, with bus times and through fares available through railway journey planning and retail systems to and from towns with no railway station or limitations in service provision.

Bidders may also need to address the absence, or potential loss, of access via public transport in places, particularly rural areas, where there is little or no funding for bus services. Bidders should be encouraged to explore how they can contribute to potential initiatives for demand-led schemes.

Improving access to stations should drive rail usage and provide some additional revenue. Bidders will also need to work with local authorities and other agencies to explore other funding opportunities. There may be scope for local authorities to use planning gain mechanisms for schemes linked to new developments. The opportunities for development around stations to accommodate improved access facilities, including interchange, should also be considered within bidders' proposals.

Question 3 - Stations

Q3: Please list, in priority order, the facilities you would like improved or introduced at the station(s) you use or could use?

For each point that you raise, please provide the name of the station(s) that you are referring to and why you think these improvements are needed.

4.3 Station facilities

Our research¹² into passenger priorities asked passengers about their priorities for both provision of, and improvements to, station facilities. Appendix 3 details the findings for Great Britain at high, medium and low footfall stations. It also details the findings for London Midland passengers as a whole.

The highest priority for provision of station facilities for London Midland passengers is toilets at 42 per cent. This is followed by waiting rooms at 34 per cent, canopies over platforms at 29 per cent and cash points at 27 per cent. Free Wi-Fi is the fifth highest priority for provision for London Midland passengers. In the Great Britain sample, free Wi-Fi being provided is the top priority and important across each station category.

The highest priority for improvement of station facilities for London Midland passengers is seating on platforms at 44 per cent. This is followed by shelter on platforms at 28 per cent, litter bins at 18 per cent, toilets at 15 per cent and waiting rooms at 12 per cent.

These findings emphasise the importance of stations meeting passengers' basic needs for toilets and shelter. Being able to buy refreshments or convenience items also features prominently in the priorities for provision of facilities while an improvement in information is desired by many.

Table 2, below, shows NRPS satisfaction scores for station attributes for London Midland and building blocks (Spring 2015 and Autumn 2015 combined). This shows how satisfaction with a range of factors varies across the network.

London Commuter routes tend to have lower satisfaction, particularly on key areas such as both availability and attitudes and helpfulness of staff, but also on other important factors such as cleanliness, seating and ticket buying facilities. West Coast routes tends to have higher levels of satisfaction although it scores poorly on the choice of shops/eating/drinking facilities available. However, it should not be assumed that passengers at all stations along those routes will have the same requirements or levels of satisfaction.

Within these routes satisfaction scores for passengers at individual stations may fall well below the average. RE and bidders are recommended to look in detail at the NRPS database for London Midland to explore areas where attention should be directed.¹³ Appendix 2 shows a comparison of London Midland against the sector, and of each building block against the comparable typology.

¹² <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/rail-passengers-priorities-for-improvements-october-2014>

¹³ Individual station data is available on request where there is sufficient sample size.

**Table 2 Station attributes – London Midland and building blocks
NRPS Spring 2015/Autumn 2015 combined, percentage satisfied**

Factor	London Midland	London Commuter	West Coast	West Midlands
Overall satisfaction with the station	78	76	80	78
Ticket buying facilities	77	71	82	78
Provision of information about train times/platforms	84	82	86	84
The upkeep/repair of the station buildings/platforms	69	66	71	70
Cleanliness	75	70	79	76
The facilities and services	55	58	63	52
The attitudes and helpfulness of the staff	74	68	87	73
Connections with other forms of public transport	66	70	75	63
Facilities for car parking	55	52	68	54
Overall environment	68	64	72	69
Your personal security whilst using the station	72	72	72	71
The availability of staff	60	53	77	58
The provision of shelter facilities	67	55	75	69
Availability of seating	52	34	67	55
How request to station staff was handled	90	*	*	90
The choice of shops/eating/drinking facilities available	46	47	43	46
Facilities for bicycle parking at the station	55	63	60	51
<i>Five or more percentage points below the London Midland average</i>				
<i>Five or more percentage points above the London Midland average</i>				
*No data shown due to sample size below 100				

4.3.1 Station investment should focus on passenger needs

Whilst Transport Focus is supportive of the principle of funding streams allocated to specific purposes, it is important passenger needs are central to the investments made. Resources should be directed to the factors valued by the users of specific stations and the rail services from them. To this end, proposals should be required to reference how they address the findings of research into passenger requirements and perceptions of stations, including NRPS satisfaction scores.

Transport Focus's research¹⁴ amongst London Midland passengers indicated concerns about lack of shelter and toilets, in line with the passengers' priorities for improvement research. Personal security, poor revenue protection and problems with ticket machines were also highlighted.

Aspirations for improvement at stations include:

- more (working) ticket machines

¹⁴ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/london-midland-rail-franchise-passenger-research>

- clearer communication about dates for station improvement works and reasons for renovations
- free Wi-Fi at stations
- improved waiting areas (warmer, more comfortable seating)
- cleaner toilets
- easier platform access for disabled passengers (e.g. more lifts)
- more, free car parking spaces
- better, more varied choice of food outlets at stations (independent shops)
- improved shelter, seating and security at smaller stations.

Disabled passengers' had some additional requirements for closer parking, step free access and more platform seating. For passengers with mobility issues platform changes can be problematic if sufficient notice isn't given.

Transport Focus research conducted at Clapham Junction, Barking and Luton stations following the Better Rail Stations report¹⁵ shows that at individual stations there are often specific areas of improvements that passengers want to see and that priorities can vary according to location and circumstance. Bidders should seek station feedback from local passengers and community rail partnerships to identify aspirations for specific locations and gather information about relevant accessibility issues.

In addition to those three stations Transport Focus conducted a detailed piece of research, in partnership with Network Rail, looking at what areas of the station passengers wanted to see improved as part of the National Station Improvement Programme (NSIP). Twenty six stations which were due to benefit from NSIP investment were surveyed in 2008/09 – most, but not all, of the stations were in London and the South East. Detailed passenger surveys were conducted at each of the stations asking passengers to rate different aspects of the service (environment, parking, information, waiting shelters etc) and what areas of the station they would like to see improved (also what they would prioritise).

Transport Focus produced 26 individual stations reports and a summary document¹⁶. A fuller report¹⁷ is also available. Once the works were complete the surveys were repeated at some of the 26 stations in order to see how the satisfaction scores had changed¹⁸. The results for the seven stations Transport Focus went back to, combined, showed an overall improvement of satisfaction by 30 percentage points. The positive impact of doing work at each of the stations was clear to see, with the most instrumental factors in driving up overall passenger satisfaction being:

¹⁵ The Better Stations Report identified 10 of the worst category B stations in the country. Clapham Junction, Barking and Luton, all featured in that list.

¹⁶ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/national-station-improvement-programme-summary-report>

¹⁷ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/national-station-improvement-programme-final-report>

¹⁸ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/national-station-improvement-programme-phase-two-report>

improvements to the appearance of the booking office, the condition of platform shelters, the footbridges, ticket sales points, the main entrances/exits, and the waiting rooms.

4.3.2 The importance of staffing and information

Transport Focus research on stations consistently demonstrates that, in addition to station facilities, there are two key factors that operators need to consider when thinking about how to improve passenger satisfaction with stations: information and staff.

4.3.2.1 Passenger information requirements

The way the industry manages delays is the biggest single driver of rail passenger dissatisfaction; the key to improving this is through the provision of accurate, timely and consistent information about delays. Despite the increasing use of technology many passengers still only tend to find out about disruption once they have arrived at the station. It is therefore crucial that operators look at how they can best pass on accurate information to the passenger once it is known to the industry. This is particularly important at unstaffed stations where the passengers' only source of information might be a Customer Information Screen (CIS). Real time information provision at all stations should be a core requirement of the franchise.

Other types of information are also important to passengers. It is important that the franchise specification requires high standards of information provision for all stages of the journey. This should include requirements to meet passenger needs for initial planning, at the station of departure, during the journey, at the arrival station and, particularly, when there is disruption. The operator should be required to adopt strategies that maximise the effective use of evolving technology. (See Appendix 4 for details of information used by passengers at different stages of the journey).

It is also important that, at all times when trains are running, passengers can have access to someone who can provide useful and appropriate information and, if disruption means that journeys are curtailed, is also empowered to help stranded passengers by arranging/authorising alternative transport, accommodation or other relevant responses.

4.3.2.2 Better railway stations

The specification for the next franchise should require bidders to commit to ensuring that minimum standards - appropriate for the size, footfall, location and reflecting local passenger aspiration - are delivered and maintained at all stations. The Better Rail Station standards¹⁹ could provide a starting point for the assessment of requirements which can then be adjusted for local circumstances.

Further cycles of investment should also be committed to maintain and progressively improve upon the station environment and facilities.

¹⁹ <http://assets.dft.gov.uk/publications/better-rail-stations/report.pdf>

We suggest consideration is given to specifying a rolling programme of steady improvement to stations on a line of route basis, to concentrate benefits in a way that should create a bigger impact than spreading improvements around randomly. This should also create greater synergies in the works.

In addition to utilising all available industry funding schemes, the operator should also look beyond these and work with stakeholders and other partners to seek opportunities to bring in funding for allied improvements where these address wider objectives such as promoting economic development, improving transport integration, increasing safe access or enhancing the public realm. Holistic improvements to investments in and around stations are likely to deliver better results and increase efficiency and value.

4.3.2.3 Staffing

The pressure on the industry to reduce costs inevitably places a focus on the overheads associated with staff. However, Transport Focus is concerned that the next franchise operator does not overlook the very significant roles staff play and the value passengers attach to a visible staff presence, especially at stations.²⁰

One of the findings from our London Midland qualitative research was that staff are appreciated and considered friendly and helpful. However, staff can be hard to find or smaller stations may be unstaffed. They are also considered to sometimes lack up to date knowledge and unable to provide information about disruption.

Business/leisure passengers said that they would like to see more station staff to:

- help passengers find the best priced tickets at station machines
- ensure safety at night, particularly on smaller stations or with intoxicated passengers on board
- inform of disruptions and alternative transport options in unfamiliar stations.

Staff are seen as an important and trusted source of information for passengers. This role can encompass information about journey planning, cover wider issues relating to ticket retailing, where there remains considerable complexity about terms and conditions applicable to tickets, and, of course, sale of tickets that are unavailable from TVMs.

Passengers with assistance needs are particularly dependent on staff to deliver the help they require and to fulfil requests made through Passenger Assist.

²⁰ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/passenger-attitudes-towards-rail-staff>

Many station facilities and services are available only whilst staff are present. Feedback indicates significant concern about the lack of access to toilets and waiting rooms if staff are withdrawn from stations or hours are significantly reduced. Passengers cite the lack of staff as a major reason for their feelings of concern over personal security and consistently identify a visible staff presence as being important to providing reassurance to those travelling on the railway. It is vital that those staff receive the appropriate training both in terms of managing the station environment and personal security within it, and customer service. The industry needs to give serious consideration to how it can best deploy staff and make best use of the different types of complimentary policing available to it. Our publication, *Passenger perceptions of personal security on the railways*²¹, sets out passengers' concerns in more detail. The specification should include a requirement to set out how these issues will be addressed across the franchise.

It is important that staff are trained, managed and supported to deliver the highest possible levels of customer service. Expectations of customer service continue to rise as standards do across the range of passenger experience, both within and beyond the rail industry.

The organisational culture must recognise that passengers are the very reason the organisation exists, ensuring that passengers are valued and appreciated at every level of the operation. This approach needs to be driven from the top to achieve exemplary staff behaviours amongst a workforce that is genuinely empowered. The ethos must be that passenger interests are central to the decisions and actions of the business, making a genuine and consistent demonstration of care for whether a passenger returns to travel again.

Question 4 – Train facilities and environment

Q4: Thinking of the train journeys you make, how important are the following [listed] on board passenger facilities to you on short distance and long distance train services.

Where possible, please explain why

Please also identify any other on board passenger facilities not listed above that you deem very important and you think should be improved or introduced. This can include any comments you have about the presentation or cleanliness of your train.

Please note capacity and seat availability is covered in the next section.

²¹ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/passenger-perceptions-of-personal-security-on-the-railways>

4.4 The on-board experience

Transport Focus has not conducted sufficiently detailed research on these individual on-board facilities to rate them in order of importance. However, it is likely that the relative importance of various facilities will vary according to the personal needs and purpose of travel of different passengers, including the length of their journey.

Our research into passengers' priorities for improvement indicates that accurate and timely information on trains, free Wi-Fi and well maintained, clean toilets are important priorities for London Midland passengers at eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth respectively.

The qualitative research amongst London Midland passengers found that facilities on board the train are perceived to be basic and outdated. People complained about a lack of comfort for longer journeys, a layout and lack of hand rails that makes standing difficult, litter, dirty toilets and lack of plugs.

There were a number of suggestions made for improving the on-board experience including:

- cleaner carriages and toilets (where available) on board the train
- better regulated temperature, adapted to outside and what people are likely to be wearing
- free, working Wi-Fi on board the train
- plug sockets available at seats
- information screens on-board to display disruption messages along with next stops.

Beyond the core journey requirements - relating to the timetable, service delivery and information - the key influencer of passenger satisfaction on trains is the cleanliness of the inside of the train. The specification should require bidders to demonstrate how high standards for this important aspect of experience will be established and maintained, including the arrangements for maintenance and cleaning of toilets.

The specification should also require bidders to consider how well the current mixed fleet meets passenger needs and expectations for the on-board environment, and to propose appropriate steps to deliver an improved experience, taking evidence, local circumstances and consultation responses into account in their proposals.

Question 5 – Dealing with overcrowding

Q5: We are looking carefully to see what opportunities there are to either extend or provide additional trains to deliver more space/standard class seating for passengers to help reduce overcrowding. If we cannot create all the additional capacity we need in this way, how do you think we could enable more people to travel and improve the railway's ability to cater for passenger

growth (e.g. altering carriages, removing/ reducing on board facilities or introducing innovative solutions)?

Where possible, please provide reasons for your answer.

4.5 The need for more capacity

It is vital that the next franchise makes adequate provision for ongoing capacity increases to accommodate the anticipated growth in passenger demand.

Passengers regard provision of capacity as a fundamental requirement of the rail service, both in terms of sufficient seating and standing room, and appropriate frequency of service.

For London Midland passengers, 'passengers are always able to get a seat on the train' is the second highest priority for improvement. It has an importance of more than three and a half times higher than an 'average' factor. The NRPS reinforces overcrowding as a particular area of concern for some London Midland passengers. Satisfaction with 'sufficient room to sit and stand' is at 65 per cent on the London Commuter route and 68 per cent on the West Midlands route, compared to 73 per cent on the West Coast route.

We know that 'trains sufficiently frequent at the times I wish to travel' is the third highest priority for London Midland passengers. Clearly, the more services that run the more seats are available, hence greater capacity. The NRPS shows satisfaction with frequency of services is lower amongst West Coast passengers (75 per cent), than on London Commuter (81 per cent) and West Midlands routes (80 per cent).

Research amongst London Midland passengers identified capacity as an issue for many. There is overcrowding on many lines during peak hours that can make it difficult to move through the train. Passengers feel that the situation is getting worse but not being addressed.

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

(Northampton, Commuter, Older)

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

Transport Focus sees limited opportunity for the West Midlands franchise to ease crowding other than either by providing additional capacity on existing trains or running extra trains. Therefore, the next West Midlands franchisee should be incentivised to seek out opportunities to acquire suitable diesel and electric rolling stock to increase the size of the fleet, as and when these arise.

4.5.1 Making better use of capacity

The service specifications and service options developed for the franchise must give full consideration to the capacity implications of all proposals.

Transport Focus believes that the franchise specification should require the bidders to take all reasonable steps to provide sufficient capacity across all services throughout the life of the franchise. Targets should be for crowding levels to be lower than currently exist, with a requirement to plan to stay ahead of growth in demand.

We recognise this will present some challenges. However, this issue is too important to passengers to be ignored. In the longer term this will mean working with Network Rail to develop the infrastructure options identified through the long term planning process, once the Route Study for West Midlands and Chilterns has been completed.²² In the shorter-term it means targets for reducing short-formations (i.e. providing fewer carriages than planned) and cancellations, as well as enhanced monitoring of crowding at intermediate points.

To effectively manage crowding, a train company needs high quality loadings data with the ability to analyse individual trains, different days of the week and seasonal impacts. This more granular detail should be used to inform careful allocation of the available capacity to optimise the response to demand pressures across the network.

A thorough review of all timetables must be undertaken to explore how services can best be matched to passenger needs. There may well be opportunities to adapt frequencies and stopping patterns to provide a better match of capacity with demand, whilst still ensuring the needs of all passengers are balanced appropriately.

There should be a requirement for the next operator to utilise all available data and information to monitor and continually improve the ongoing situation. Bidders should be required to demonstrate their plans to ensure sufficient resources within the franchise to enable a sophisticated and responsive approach to train service development, combined with a positive strategy of stakeholder engagement to explain the rationale for service proposals.

The future operator must be required to adopt and publish appropriate crowding measures that are more representative of individual passenger's experiences across the range of routes and services. Published data should make the crowding levels on different services easily comparable so that decisions about allocation of resources can be scrutinised. NRPS satisfaction measures for relevant factors, including overall satisfaction and room to sit and stand, should be published alongside capacity data to demonstrate the impact this has on passengers.

²² <http://www.networkrail.co.uk/long-term-planning-process/route-studies/>

Monitoring and publishing the extent and frequency of short-formations and cancellations should also be a requirement. There should be increasingly punitive penalties (to be reinvested in measures that will strengthen capabilities) where there are regular failures to provide the programmed diagrams to operate timetables.

Other approaches to management of capacity should also be implemented.

Transparent information about the loadings of specific trains provides passengers with the knowledge that may enable them to make an informed decision. Research has found that over two thirds of passengers who had seen information about the levels of crowding on specific train services had found it useful and just over a fifth of these people had made a regular or occasional change to the trains they used as a result of the information²³.

A traffic-light system of information should be made available to passengers to help them understand the likelihood of getting a seat, or even getting onto, a particular train. This allows passengers who have more flexibility to make an informed choice about their travel options and, even where there are more defined patterns of travel, some passengers may appreciate the option of being able to make small adjustments or trade-offs to have a comfortable journey.

Similarly, fares incentives for passengers to sometimes swap peak journeys with travel in the shoulder or off-peak, or perhaps work closer to home on some days, may also make a contribution to capacity pressures. Cliff-face price differentials that lead to under-utilisation on some higher-priced services and a flood of passengers on the first cheaper trains should also be avoided.

Technological solutions should also be adopted. Crowding can now be monitored in real time and information systems and apps are becoming available to indicate where available seats on trains are located²⁴.

Additional efforts should be made to respond to passengers who have physical difficulties in standing for any length of time. Initiatives such as priority seating and cards²⁵ that the holder can show to identify a proven need should be part of the overall plan for improving accessibility within the franchise.

Transport Focus believes that the West Midlands franchise should operate in accordance with the established principle that 'it is reasonable for passengers to expect to get a seat for journeys of more than twenty minutes, and to have sufficient space even if they are standing for shorter journeys'. This should be the benchmark for capacity provision.

²³ The impact of publishing more information on seat availability: South West Trains case study, ORR July 2012

²⁴ For example, Dutch Railways - iNStApp: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rc6R3qt6SXI>

²⁵ For example, <http://www.southernrailway.com/your-journey/accessibility/priority-seat-card/>

The future operator should be incentivised to ensure that available rolling stock is never sitting in sidings when there is evidence of need for additional capacity on services where it could be deployed. In addition, the franchise specifications should require that the particular needs for additional capacity for special events must also be planned for and managed within the overall framework of train availability.

Where further investment in additional rolling stock would provide the necessary capacity to meet identified requirements during the life of the franchise, the onus should be on the operator to build a business case to enable this to happen. If there is a commercial case then there should be prompt action to deliver the necessary vehicles. Where additional subsidy will or may be required, Transport Focus expects the operator and the RE to work together with regional partners to seek an affordable solution. Where required, assessments should look beyond the immediate franchise into the longer term to create a viable mechanism to respond to identified demand.

Over the lifetime of the franchise the operator must be required to work with Network Rail and within the wider industry processes to develop proposals to further increase capacity to meet the expected rise in demand and ensure this information is available to inform future High Level Output Specification (HLOS) plans and investment cycles.

4.5.2 Rolling stock capacity and configuration

Ultimately, views on the suitability of particular rolling stock configurations are likely to be driven by personal circumstances related to the type of journey being made and the likelihood of a seat, or even standing room, being available at the point the train is boarded.

Transport Focus has conducted several research projects on rolling stock design, and where capacity has proved to be a driving force for change there are two areas that passengers consistently point to in terms of need for improvement:

- the design of the aisle/gangway running the length of the carriage
- the vestibule area/entrance to the carriage.

4.5.2.1 Thameslink rolling stock research²⁶

Those passengers boarding trains nearer to London displayed a high degree of pragmatism, although it probably resulted from 'conditioning', accepting that even with 12 coach trains they were unlikely to get a seat in the morning peak. Flowing from that there was a clear view that the new trains should be designed to allow passengers to stand in complete safety and as comfortably as possible – though there were some who thought the new trains should be designed to provide a better chance of them getting a seat.

In order to facilitate this, participants in the Thameslink research were quick to point out the need for improved provision of grab rails/handles. Passengers identified this

²⁶ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/thameslink-rolling-stock-qualitative-research>

as a major area for improvement, as existing carriages in service were seen to be particularly uncomfortable to stand in because there was nothing suitable to aid their stability. This was particularly a problem for shorter passengers, and those travelling with children or more than one bag.

In the saloon area, passengers were often reluctant to move down the carriage away from the vestibule area if they perceived there to be nothing for them to hold on to.

“I’m too short to reach the rails, and I won’t move down the carriage because it’s dangerous for me. People don’t understand this and get irate.” (Bedford group, Commuter)

Passengers welcomed designs that showed wider gangways/aisles between each coach, as they were felt to greatly enhance freedom of movement along the train, and provided more standing space; but only if coupled with something to hold on to when doing so.

The vestibule area itself was also mentioned in this respect, making passengers feel unsafe if they have to stand. The results of the Thameslink research were echoed in later research conducted on Merseyrail trains by Transport Focus.

4.5.2.2 Merseyrail rolling stock research²⁷

Research conducted in partnership with Merseytravel demonstrated that of those passengers who stood on-board existing trains, just 46 per cent were satisfied with the space available to them and only 41 per cent with the provision of grab rails. The research identified congestion in the vestibule as being a frequent problem when travelling on Merseyrail trains. This was not felt to be an issue that was unique to Merseyrail services, since some respondents claimed to have experienced this when travelling with other TOCs and on London Underground. However, in the context of existing passenger volumes and the fact that most were able to get a seat, even during peak times, this seemed to be a large problem on Merseyrail trains, in relative terms.

Much of the congestion seemed to be caused by passengers travelling with bikes and pushchairs standing in the vestibule areas – in part a consequence of not having dedicated areas or a flexible space (e.g. tip up seats near the doors) that could be used for such purposes. This was often assumed to be the easiest option due to the relatively large floor space and not having to navigate round other passengers and the partition on either side of the entrances. However the main reason for passengers being reluctant to stand in the gangways was the widespread perception of not being able to do so safely or comfortably.

²⁷ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/future-merseyrail-rolling-stock-what-passengers-want>

This is primarily due to the lack of usable grab poles in this part of the carriage (even in comparison with the vestibule areas). The rail attached to the overhead luggage shelf was considered to be too high and/or too far away from the aisle for most passengers to reach comfortably and the discs on top of the seats were thought to be difficult to hold firmly enough to provide stability when standing on a moving train.

“When the train is full there’s nothing to hold onto for security. There used to be straps hanging from the ceiling but there are other things that could be done.” (Leisure user, West Kirby)

The narrowness of the space creates the perception that there is a risk of those who move down the aisle becoming trapped there. This creates concerns about being able to get off quickly enough and perhaps missing the intended stop, especially for those making relatively short journeys.

“I don’t want to go right into the carriage if it’s busy because I might not be able to get off at my stop if the train is full.” (Leisure user, West Kirby)

Question 6 - Connections between rail services

Q6: Thinking about stations served by the West Midlands franchise, are there any particular locations where you feel that connections between rail services could be improved?

If relevant please provide specific details about the services, times and locations where train times are not coordinated as well as they could be.

Please also provide information on any other factors at stations or on trains that would make changing between services easier and more attractive for you, including your reasons where possible.

4.6 Making connections simple and straightforward

Individual passengers and local stakeholders are best placed to report on their experiences of specific connections and the improvements they would like to see. However, we are able to draw on evidence to comment on the overarching themes relevant to the network and passengers as a whole.

‘Connections with other train services are always good’ ranks fifteenth of 31 priority factors for improvement for London Midland passengers, the same as the Great Britain sample overall. NRPS shows a variation with satisfaction across the network with West Coast passengers the most satisfied at 80 per cent compared to 72 per cent satisfaction on the London Commuter route (table 3).

Table 3 Connections with other train services, NRPS Autumn 2015, percentage satisfied: National, LSE, London Midland, Building Blocks

National	London and South East	London Midland	London Commuter	West Coast	West Midlands
76	75	77	72	80	77

Qualitative research amongst London Midland passengers indicated a desire for clearer timetabling, with better coordinated connections with other train operators' trains.

Some rural stations do not have step-free access to cross over to other platforms, which can make connections difficult for people with mobility issues or those with buggies or luggage.

Passengers using Crewe station complained of short notice given for platform alterations. This can mean that even connections which normally work well can be difficult for passengers.

Disabled passengers in particular want early notice of platform changes, feeling that announcements are often last minute and do not allow enough time to walk to the new platform.

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

During disruption connections become more challenging as passengers may have to make a journey they are unfamiliar with or travel through a station they are unused to. Good quality information is key to ensuring passengers can make these connections as easily as possible.

We know from the research amongst London Midland passengers that communication at stations during disruption is considered to be poor and an area requiring considerable improvement. Business and leisure users would like to see more staff on trains and at stations to provide information during disruption, including offering advice about alternative transport options in unfamiliar stations. Our recommendations for providing information during disruption are set out in section 4.10.

For passengers to confidently make journeys that are reliant on connections the operator must provide punctual and reliable services and good quality information for all circumstances relating to the journey. Well-timed connections with sufficient, but not excessive, time between arriving and departing trains and ease of transfer between the platforms are also important. Where possible this should be a level transfer, with minimal distance between arrival and departure points.

Question area B – services that cater for competitive growing economies

Question 7 – Train services

Q7: In order to make improvements to the network, we would like your views on how specific train services could be changed to better meet demand with a focus on the following areas:

- Where demand merits it, increasing service frequency:
 - In the peak and/or off peak period
 - During evenings, Saturdays and Sundays
 - In the early morning (i.e. before the peak period)
 - Over the Christmas and New Year period
- Where demand is low and resources/funding could be better used in areas that need it more, decreasing service frequency:
 - In the peak and/or off peak period
 - During evenings, Saturdays and Sundays
 - In the early morning (i.e. before the peak period)
 - Over the Christmas and New Year period
- Increasing or decreasing service levels on a seasonal basis to better match travel patterns during these times
- Reducing the number of stops at stations used by few people to provide quicker services for through passengers
- Increasing the number of stops at stations where demand is higher than the current train frequency merits
- Adjusting the times of first and/or last services where this better meets today's travel patterns
- Introducing new routes or services and providing new links to stations including those not currently served by the franchise e.g. to other regions
- Reopening railway lines currently not used by passenger services

Considering the areas set out above are you aware of any opportunities to improve, reduce or change rail services to make better use of resource and meet the needs of existing and prospective passengers?

Please provide reasons and evidence to support your views where possible.

4.7 Train service specification

The specification for the future franchise should provide a framework to ensure that train service provision is based on passenger needs and priorities and is linked to key measures of passenger satisfaction.

Figure 1 illustrates that capacity factors – in terms of the ability to get a seat and the frequency of trains and – rank second and third as priorities for improvement, only behind better value for money. More trains arriving on time ranks fourth.

Along with punctuality and reliability and cleanliness of the inside of the train, figure 2 shows that NRPS drivers of passenger satisfaction on London Midland include the length of time of the journey, sufficient room for all passengers to sit and stand and the frequency of trains on the route. Drivers of dissatisfaction also include the ease of getting on and off (which may, at least in part, reflect crowding pressures) as well as the length of time of the journey. (See figure 3).

The evidence makes clear that an effective train service specification is of major significance to passengers.

NRPS for the West Coast building block shows that 75 per cent of passengers are satisfied with the frequency of trains on their route. This compares with 82 per cent for the interurban typology average, where the best in class scores 93 per cent. This suggests that more might be done to improve frequencies to address the needs of passengers travelling on the West Coast.

In our qualitative research we found London Midland passengers generally consider frequency to be adequate as long as services are reliable. There is however a demand for more services later at night and at weekends. Passengers also report problems with overcrowding and difficulty moving through the train on many lines during peak hours, indicating increased frequencies could help reduce congestion on these services.

Other work, exploring the needs of commuters, has also established a case for looking at the adequacy of timetabling for first, last and weekend trains.²⁸ An analysis of NRPS found the proportion of passengers using the existing first and last trains on their route to make commuting journeys is considerable, and is even higher at weekends.

First trains in particular are regularly used, especially at the weekend. First trains are used on an occasional or regular basis by more than one in five commuters during the week, by 31 per cent of those commuting on Saturday and 62 per cent on Sunday (of which 39 per cent use the first train on Sunday regularly).

Of those using the first train, 75 per cent of commuters consider it to be early enough for their needs. However, satisfaction with the timing of the first train drops to only 59 per cent amongst those who commute at weekends.

Last trains are also used in a similar pattern across the week, although to a lesser extent overall. Whilst 64 per cent of those that use the last train consider it to be late enough for their needs, less than half – only 44 per cent – of those using the last train at weekends are satisfied with its timing.

²⁸ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/understanding-rail-passengers-the-average-commuter>

This demonstrates that there is a significant appetite for earlier and later services seven days a week, and particularly at weekends where demand for services for commuting journeys does not appear to be fully met by current timetables. Earlier and later services at weekends might therefore better accommodate weekend commuting.

We have not explored specific West Midlands locations in detail but would note the importance of considering the timetable needs of passengers travelling to leisure and tourist destinations such as Stratford-upon-Avon, Hereford and Coventry. Or, indeed, travelling to and from main centres such as Birmingham, Liverpool and London from smaller less well-served locations.

4.7.1 A passenger-focused specification

Transport Focus supports a specification which is flexible enough to allow the operator to review usage and how station calls are allocated to train paths in order to improve overall capacity and efficient use of resources.

However, whilst acknowledging the need for some flexibility to adapt the train service to respond to current and changing demands, Transport Focus is clear that there must be sufficient detail in the specification to protect key journey opportunities. These must include journeys to/from school and work and, at key locations, retain or improve connection opportunities. There must also be proper consultation / publicity surrounding the changes such that people have a chance to comment on the impact it will have on them.

Alterations to service patterns will inevitably flow from the development of rail and other infrastructure. New journey opportunities may become available, or required, as markets change and grow. Input from passengers, local and regional bodies and other stakeholders may identify other circumstances which require recognition in the service specification and it is vital that RE takes this on board as more detailed plans for the specification are drawn up.

The specification for the West Midlands franchise should require bidders to plan and resource an effective, optimised service pattern that meets the needs of passengers. This should also include consideration of the appropriate capacity and frequencies required for earlier and later in the day as well as weekends and bank holidays. In respect of the latter, the invitation to tender should give strong encouragement for bidders to explore the potential for services to run on 26 December and other dates where there is identifiable demand.

The service specifications and service options developed by bidders for the franchise must demonstrate full consideration to the capacity implications of all proposals.

Whatever the plans for the train service it is essential that the timetable proposals are subject to proper consultation, including the initial proposals for the specification.

Within requirements protecting minimum service levels, the next operator should be given flexibility to develop the train service to meet the needs of existing and potential passengers. They should be tasked with creating the best timetable for the places they serve, balancing the range of factors important to passengers.

Engagement with passengers and local communities should be regarded as a starting point for service developments. There must be a requirement for timely, transparent and meaningful consultation that allows all stakeholders views to be listened to prior to changes being finalised. Feedback, irrespective of whether it has been possible to accommodate the recommendation or request, must be provided.

From the outset, and throughout the life of the franchise, there are some principles that should be embedded, to be followed whenever timetables are revised:

- early consultation with passengers must be a prerequisite, and followed by honest feedback about why the ultimate decisions were made
- existing basic features such as first/last trains, if satisfactory, should remain
- aspirations for improvements should be met if possible
- capacity and resources should be matched as closely as possible.

Transport Focus believes that the train services should be structured around the journeys that passengers wish to make. The key issue is whether passengers at each station have the required level of service to and from the places they want or need to travel at the times they wish to do so. The starting point should be to optimise rail services based on passenger demand and any new opportunities that become available. The provision of sufficient capacity must be addressed, particularly for times of peak demand.

Our view is that origin and destination data should be used as the basis for understanding existing travel requirements. This data is available to the industry, but not generally to stakeholders. Without access to this key data and other relevant information, particularly about network capacity, timetabling options and comprehensive assessments of stakeholder views, it is not possible for others to derive a properly balanced judgement about service options. It is therefore important that, when considering choices and bringing forward proposals, the decision makers, whether RE, Network Rail (NR) or the operator, should ensure that the rationale that underpins them is properly set out to all who have an interest.

The service specification should take a holistic view of the needs of all passengers: commuter, business and leisure, from all parts of the network. Timetable opportunities must be optimised with passenger interests placed at the heart of planning and ahead of operational convenience. Within the acknowledged capacity constraints of the franchise the distribution of train services should be appropriate to passenger demand. Where possible there should be clearly differentiated services for different markets.

Question 8 – Timetable patterns

Q8: Some services between stations operate with irregular gaps between trains. In these situations, it may be possible to make changes to the service pattern in order to operate a service with a more evenly spaced timetable. More information on the passenger advantages and disadvantages of this are available on page 38.

Considering this information, and assuming the same amount of seats would be provided per hour, in principle would you prefer either:

- **A service that operates to an evenly spaced timetable so that gaps between trains are regular (with potentially fewer trains/longer journey times); or**
- **A service that operates at irregular times with more trains per hour, however there may be a mixture of long and small gaps between services at some stations.**

Please explain your reasons.

If you are aware of any routes or locations where you feel that a more evenly spaced timetable can or should be operated please provide details.

4.8 Timetable spacing

Individual passengers and local stakeholders are best placed to give their views on whether a more evenly spaced timetable would be preferred. As with all timetable considerations this will depend on individual needs. Whatever the plans for the train service it is essential that the timetable proposals are subject to proper consultation. We address this fully in section 4.7.1.

Question 9 - London Euston to Crewe service

Q9. The West Midlands franchise currently provides an hourly service from London Euston to Crewe via Stoke-on-Trent. Passenger numbers have grown significantly. There is an issue however that some of the stations between Stoke-on-Trent and Crewe have shorter platforms that can only cater for four carriages. This means trains either have to be limited to four carriages and often become crowded or they are longer but have to run directly from Stafford to Crewe, missing out Stone, Stoke-on-Trent, Kidsgrove and Alsager.

We would like people's views on whether the current service should continue to operate as it does now, or whether a direct route from Stafford to Crewe should be run at all times, providing a consistent timetable and allowing longer trains to operate. It is possible that this service could be provided by another operator through another franchise. We would ensure that there is no reduction to the number of services per hour at each station between Stafford and Crewe via Stoke-on-Trent. We are currently exploring options for through services to alternative destinations for passengers at these stations, for

example to Birmingham. More information on this including passenger advantages and disadvantages are available on page 40.

Considering the information outlined above, which of these options would you prefer and why?

- Maintaining the current direct London Midland service from London Euston to Crewe via Stoke-on-Trent; or
- Operating the current Euston to Crewe service directly from Stafford to Crewe, and providing an alternative service for stations between Stafford, Stoke-on-Trent and Crewe which would provide new links to destinations south of Stafford.

Where possible please provide your reasons.

If you have a priority for which new destinations an alternative service between Stafford, Stoke-on-Trent and Crewe should serve please let us know here.

4.9 Assessing the options and impact

Transport Focus does not have access to journey/LENNNON data about existing patterns of travel on this route or other relevant local and regional information. This means it is very difficult to comment on the options and the potential impact or benefits of possible new arrangements. However, we would ask whether Selective Door Opening has been considered for this route (i.e. to allow trains that are longer than the platform to safely call at the station).

It is also not clear whether other timetabling options were considered as part of this process – the two in the consultation seem to be presented as an either/or option in isolation. Nor is it clear whether this includes any assessment of the longstanding issues at Polesworth, Barlaston and Norton Bridge where services were withdrawn/alterd as part of the previous West Coast Route Modernisation programme. It is difficult to look at timetable changes in isolation so we would ask what consideration has been given to these issues and what impact they may have on the route plans.

As above, individual passengers and local stakeholders are best placed to give their views on service preferences. Whatever the next proposals to be considered it is essential that the full details are subject to proper consultation. We address this fully in section 4.7.1.

Question 10 – Disruption on the railway

Q10: During railway disruption what information would you like to know, and when and how would you like to receive it during:

- Known disruption such as engineering works
- Unplanned disruption such as signalling issues?

Please provide your reasons and examples of where this works well either by the existing train company or elsewhere on the wider rail/public transport network.

4.10 Managing disruption

The provision of high quality and effective passenger information during disruption (PIDD) is vitally important. However, it is intrinsically linked to the broader topic of managing or, better still, minimising the disruption that blights far too many passenger experiences. Transport Focus therefore wishes to highlight the more general issue of disruption, along with a number of recommendations, as well as comments on the provision of information when things do go wrong.

In NRPS, the most significant ‘driver’ of passenger dissatisfaction for London Midland, as it is nationally, is how the train operator handles delays. The 2014 priorities research identifies that five of the top ten priorities for London Midland passengers relate to avoiding and managing disruption. A closer look at key factors relating to disruption in the NRPS (Spring 2015 and Autumn 2015 combined – see table 4 below) shows that London Midland passengers’ satisfaction is very low on ‘how well train company dealt with delays’ at 38 per cent. Satisfaction on London Commuter routes is particularly poor at 26 per cent. Satisfaction with ‘usefulness of information during delays’ is low at 53 per cent, but again, particularly so for London Commuter routes at 38 per cent.

Table 4 Dealing with delays, NRPS Spring 2015/Autumn 2015, percentage satisfied: London Midland and building blocks

Factor	London Midland	London Commuter	West Coast	West Midlands
How well train company dealt with delays	38	26	50	39
Usefulness of information during delays	53	38	47	59

4.10.1 Managing service disruption – unplanned

In 2014 Transport Focus published research looking at passengers’ needs and experiences during unplanned disruption²⁹, including around the provision of information. We made a number of recommendations and encourage RE to ensure that bidders have credible plans to address them. However there are two key points that must be tackled from day one of the new franchise:

- The cultural issue, across the industry, that deficiencies in passenger information at times of disruption persist in a way that would not be tolerated if they were operational or safety failures.

²⁹ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/passenger-information-when-trains-are-disrupted>

- That the operator must measure the quality of information provided during disruption on a robust and ongoing basis, in terms both of ‘factory gate’ quality and the ultimate test of passenger opinion.

In addition to the recommendations within that research we encourage RE to secure as part of the new franchises two important prerequisites for providing effective passenger information during disruption.

- Visual and audible information at all stations to be served by the West Midlands franchise.
- Train movement data sufficiently granular to deliver accurate live departure predictions for all stations. Fitment of GPS devices to all trains, allowing positional data to be fed to Darwin via the under-development “GPS gateway” would seem likely to be the best solution.

4.10.2 Resilience

Transport Focus recommends that the new franchise is let with a strong emphasis on service resilience, including in the face of severe weather.

The current franchise has experienced significant and ongoing problems with the availability of drivers leading to delays and cancellations. Recent figures show that London Midland ranks amongst the worst three operators for crew shortages, with 13.59 per cent of services being impacted, an entirely unacceptable figure.³⁰

Specifically, we feel the bidders should be required to:

- Consider how to improve the resilience of services over sections of route as set out in the London North West Route Weather Resilience and Climate Change Adaptation Plans.
- Set out the extent to which they will be reliant on overtime and rest day working to deliver the train service, including on Sundays and at Christmas.
- Show they have reasonable rolling stock availability assumptions and that they are not so optimistic that passengers are at continual risk of experiencing short-formed and cancelled trains. Areas to ensure there are credible plans include:
 - Capacity to release rolling stock for periodic heavy maintenance, refurbishment, PRMTIS adaptations etc. without compromising service delivery.
 - That tyre-turning capability is sufficient to ensure fleet availability remains high throughout the autumn and winter.

³⁰ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-35293307>

- Contingency arrangements if incidents result in lengthy repairs to rolling stock (for example striking road vehicles, collisions with livestock, etc.), including that key components are held in stock rather than manufactured to order.

Recent research³¹ into passengers' views and expectations of rail services during extreme weather found three core principles that the rail industry must embrace:

- provide timely, accurate information so passengers can make informed decisions about their journeys
- be transparent – help passengers understand why timetable changes and service suspensions have been made
- demonstrate that train companies and Network Rail are doing their best on behalf of passengers, despite the weather.

4.10.3 Managing service disruption – engineering works

Engineering works are an inevitable requirement of the need to maintain the infrastructure that supports rail operations and allow for improvements for the future. As such, the planning, scheduling and management of this disruption is part and parcel of regular business. There should be structured procedures for managing this activity that are regularly reviewed, then adapted and refined in the light of experience.

However, the scheduled redevelopment at Euston station which lies ahead is of such a major scale, that specific detailed plans will be required to address the challenges which these works will present. The specification for the franchise should look particularly at bidders' competencies and preparation for this work.

Regardless of scale, and as a core principle, it is vital that passengers receive appropriate and timely information about the effect that engineering works will have on their particular journey and are given appropriate advice about alternatives. It will also be important that revised timetables are robust and achievable.

More generally, bidders should be required to set out how they will work with Network Rail to minimise the use of 'all line' engineering blocks. Culturally, the default assumption must be that routes remain open while maintenance, renewal and enhancement takes place, with exceptions made where there is compelling need.

Bidders should recognise that 55 per cent of passengers say they would not travel at all if a replacement bus is involved³², and we encourage RE to secure a joint, public commitment from the future operator and Network Rail that wherever practically possible they will keep passengers on trains and transfer them to buses only as a

³¹ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/reacting-to-extreme-weather-on-the-railways>

³² <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/rail-passengers-experiences-and-priorities-during-engineering-works>

last resort. Use of diversionary routes is an important way to minimise the number of passengers needing to use replacement buses.

In addition to emphasising the overarching cultural focus on ensuring rail journeys are the default provision wherever possible, Transport Focus encourages RE to ensure that the bidders have credible proposals in the following areas:

- For regularly submitting a high quality bid to Network Rail at T-18 so accurate amended timetables are in the public domain and reservations open at T-12. We recommend that the operator should be required to report, period by period, on the level of post T-12 change to the train plan.
- For working with Network Rail to minimise the risk of possession over-runs, and for communicating information about alternative arrangements to passengers in the event that it does happen.
- For ensuring, through liaison with adjacent operators, that alternative and diversionary routes are not closed at the same time. (A number of suggestions are outlined in Appendix 5).
- For managing the transfer of passengers seamlessly from train to bus and vice versa (and from train to train where a normally-direct journey involves a change of trains), recognising the key role to be played by well-informed, people-orientated staff at interchanges.

*Recent Transport Focus research*³³ looks at passengers' experiences from two sets of planned works, at Reading and Bath Spa, in 2015. While the nature and impact of the two engineering projects were very different, the research findings provide useful insight into passengers' core information needs and offer valuable lessons for the rail industry as a whole.

The research indicates the need for a flexible approach to communications planning in the build up to planned disruption. The fact that every project and the associated disruption is different means that the onus is on train companies and Network Rail planners to know what their passengers want and understand how a specific project will affect different passenger types. The results of that assessment should then allow them to tailor communications to give the right level of detailed information when passengers want it, using the most effective communications channel. The research makes five key recommendations for planning and delivering engineering schemes:

- Consider how the various elements of the engineering work are likely to affect individual passengers' journeys: who does it affect and how?

³³ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/planned-rail-engineering-work-passenger-perspective>

- Build this insight into your planning approach so that you are able to deliver a tailored information campaign: tell passengers what they want to know about their journey, when they need to know it.
- Tailor your message.
- Timing of information: every project is different so be prepared to be flexible.
- Use full range of information channels to reach different types of passengers.

In addition to the information passengers need about how their journey will be affected and any impact on them they also need support when making a disrupted and potentially unfamiliar journey. Some practical examples of best practice include:

- Ensuring it is clear to passengers where they should wait for replacement buses and clear to bus drivers where they should stop, in particular where replacement buses do not drive up to the station itself.
- Ensuring that the needs of passengers with disabilities are met when travelling during engineering works, including but not limited to those who have booked through the Passenger Assist service. Arrangements for those encumbered with buggies/cycles/luggage etc should also be made clear to passengers in advance.
- Ensuring that passengers making journeys involving a replacement bus, or a diverted train taking significantly longer than usual, are aware of that before they purchase a ticket – whether buying online, from a Ticket Vending Machine (TVM) or at a ticket office.
- Tracking the location of replacement buses in real time and feeding that information automatically to Darwin for onward distribution to passengers (and railway staff) via National Rail Enquiries channels and others using Darwin data, including station customer information systems (CIS).
- For giving passengers answers to the questions “what is being done?” and “how do I benefit?” Passengers tell us that knowing what is happening helps sugar the replacement bus pill, yet it is commonplace to see nothing more informative than “Engineering work is taking place over some parts of the London Midland network with the following trains amended:”

Question 11 - Major events

Q11: In what ways can the franchise operator provide better services, ticketing and information for passengers to serve major events?

Please provide details of any specific events, the reasons why services need improving and any examples of best practice you are aware of.

4.11 Assessing and responding to demand

Qualitative research amongst London Midland passengers³⁴ highlighted planning and capacity during major events as an area of concern, with passengers saying that events are not adequately anticipated and train service levels not altered accordingly.

During major events significant numbers of passengers may be travelling on trains that are already crowded and through stations not designed to cope with these increased numbers. In addition, passengers may well be making journeys for the first time and therefore not be familiar with stations, routes and timetables. Provision of sufficient capacity, sensible demand management strategies, joint working with other organisations and good quality, timely information are all key to managing and delivering successful transport plans for major events.

It is essential that agencies work together to develop a strategy that is tailored to each event. This could include liaison with other train operators, other public transport providers and British Transport Police, as well as discussions with Network Rail about the scheduling of engineering works and with local councils about planned roadworks.

Provision of sufficient capacity for major events presents a challenge where services are already busy. Travel demand forecasting will allow organisers to understand which times and routes are likely to be busiest and to target any available capacity where it is most needed.

Letting passengers know which services are likely to be more or less crowded will help them make informed travel choices. Many may be happy to travel slightly earlier or later to benefit from a more comfortable journey, especially if they are told of the options for passing any extra time before or after an event. Relaxing ticket restrictions can be a useful tool to manage capacity for major events, letting passengers travel earlier than planned or with another operator.

Where demand is forecast to exceed capacity alternative transport options such as coaches must be considered.

Passengers need good quality, useful information that they can rely on when planning their journey and to help them when they are travelling to and from the

³⁴ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/london-midland-rail-franchise-passenger-research>

event. Information should be available as early as possible and kept up to date. The train operator must work with other agencies to push information out to people who are known to be, or even those who are likely to be, attending events.

It is sensible to try and manage the expectations of passengers in advance of travel. If they must get an early train to guarantee arriving in time then let them know; if they may have to queue for a long time to leave the event then advise them of this and confirm the later trains that will get them home. On event days, a strong and well-informed staff presence is essential at both stations and on trains to provide passengers with the information and reassurance they desire.

In 2015 fans travelling to the Rugby World Cup matches in Cardiff experienced severe difficulties with transport. As a result the National Assembly for Wales Enterprise and Business Committee launched an inquiry to investigate the planning and delivery of transport provision to see what lessons could be learned for future events. The findings of that inquiry contain many useful recommendations which should be considered by the industry when planning travel for major events³⁵.

Question area C – making sure you feel valued and safe

Question 12a and 12b – Fares, tickets, value for money and modal choice

Q12a: What are your views on the value for money you receive for your train journeys in the franchise area when compared to other transport choices available to you?

Q12b: Does the range of ticket types available meet your needs or are there specific examples of new types of fare that you would like to see introduced?

Where possible please give the reasons for your answer.

4.12 Value for money for passengers

Passengers are paying an increasingly high proportion of the costs of the railway and this makes the delivery of value for money a significant challenge. It is the top priority for improvement for London Midland passengers, as well as nationally.

Section 3.3.3 shows the trend in satisfaction with value for money over time, with London Midland showing increased levels of satisfaction in recent years. Table 5, below, shows that London Midland overall performs relatively well on value for money compared to the London and South East sector as a whole. However, satisfaction is significantly lower on the London Commuter building block.

³⁵ <http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld10463/cr-ld10463-e.pdf>

Table 5 Value for money, NRPS Autumn 2015, percentage satisfied: LSE, London Midland and building blocks

LSE	London Midland	London Commuter	West Coast	West Midlands
43	57	39	65	62

Research amongst London Midland passengers showed a recognition that fares are cheaper than those of other operators, however, the service is not thought to be as good. Commuters complain of ever-increasing travel costs with little improvement in service. Passengers suggested a number of areas where improvements to value for money could be made:

- simplified ticket choices with increased transparency on the best value for money options
- tickets that are valid across different operators, in case of sudden cancellation
- price increases reflective of an improved service
- fares reflective of distance travelled, with no disproportionate increases past a certain point
- better communication of offers e.g. family travel card
- a loyalty scheme where points are earned for travel
- delay repayment made straightforward and easy to claim, and compensation for shorter delays
- 'Oyster-type' smartcards which always deduct the optimal fare
- consistent 'rules' about travelling on the network without a ticket.

The Transport Focus fares and ticketing study³⁶ investigated the influences on passenger perceptions of value for money. It found that whilst intrinsically linked to the price of the ticket, value for money is also influenced by several other significant factors. These link directly to the findings of priorities research and NRPS drivers and are:

- punctuality and reliability
- being able to get a seat
- passenger information during service disruption.

Improving passenger satisfaction with these core elements of the train service must be a high priority for the West Midlands franchise. Another important factor to assist in delivering value for money is to ensure that fares and ticketing processes are fair, impartial and clear, enabling passengers to purchase the cheapest appropriate ticket for their journey. Recommendations relating to fares and ticketing are addressed in our response to question 13 below.

4.12.1 The rail efficiency agenda

Transport Focus recognises the importance of delivering value for money for

³⁶ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/fares-and-ticketing-study>

taxpayers and passengers and the need to increase the efficiency of the rail industry. We made a detailed response³⁷ to Sir Roy McNulty's rail value for money study, highlighting the important issues from a passenger perspective.

We are supportive of those strategies which enhance efficiency and create closer collaboration, reduce duplication and overlap and generate further income by increasing the attractiveness of rail.

However, there are also some legitimate anxieties expressed by passengers surrounding cost-cutting. These are particularly around the availability of staff and ensuring that station facilities are available whilst trains are running. Reducing costs through genuine improvements to efficiency will be welcomed, but there will be negative impacts if this simply results in wholesale cutbacks that do not deliver on reasonable passenger expectations and a quality of experience that makes the railway a viable and safe environment in which to travel.

Partnership working between Network Rail (NR) and the new operator should form part of the arrangements for the franchise. It will be particularly relevant given the potential complexity involved in delivering future infrastructure and timetable improvements likely to impact on the West Midlands network. These challenges will require all parties to work cohesively and constructively together.

Application of whole-life costing would significantly improve the chances that resilience projects secure a positive business case. The bidders should set out details of how they will start planning with all the relevant partners, firstly deciding where and what needs doing, then ranking in order of costs and time to implement, quickest benefits and greatest benefits.

Beyond the demands of new developments there are further operational challenges associated with such a large scale franchise stretching across a wide geographical territory and abutting a number of other important rail operations. This will require an over-arching approach to partnership and service delivery, with formal structures providing a joint mechanism at senior level for strategic planning and co-ordination.

Aligning incentives and working more closely together can certainly help improve efficiency. We know from our research that passengers want a sense of someone being in charge when it comes to the delivery of services, especially during times of disruption. But it cannot just be a case of aligning NR and train company processes to achieve cost savings; such processes must also be aligned with passengers' priorities.

If the end-game is better services for passengers then internal processes and systems must work towards this, rather than vice versa. Two particular areas stand

³⁷ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/the-rail-value-for-money-study-a-passenger-perspective-comments-by-passenger-focus>

out: increasing punctuality and reducing service disruption. Any approach must be mindful of the consequences for passengers when considering how to manage restoration of services following disruption.

Closer working may provide the opportunity to revisit previously successful practice and have the operator's staff, especially those on stations, trained as first responders to minor local operational incidents (e.g. signal and point failures or road vehicles hitting bridges) to get trains moving without having to wait for the arrival of a Network Rail staff member who may be some distance away.

A further opportunity presented by closer partnership is the achievement of a step-change in transparency. The open data agenda is driving the industry towards higher levels of information being in the public domain. We know from our research^{38,39} that passengers want access to more tailored information (i.e. data that is relevant to their route/journey). A new, more responsive, alliance could make a very public commitment towards accountability by promising greater transparency from the outset.

Question 13 – Purchasing tickets and reducing ticketless travel

Q13: We want to make it easier for passengers to pay for their journey and reduce the number of people travelling without tickets. Some of the potential options to help achieve this, subject to affordability and deliverability, could include:

- a) Providing suitable, working ticket machines at more/all stations, including unstaffed stations, to ensure that passengers always have the ability to purchase a ticket before they travel, including when booking offices are closed;**
- b) Promoting and developing new and innovative options for how people pay for their journey, such as the wider roll out of smart ticketing (where journeys are paid for with an electronic card), bank card or mobile phone payments and working with other retailers to sell tickets;**
- c) Removing the Permit to Travel machines, encouraging passengers to use the ticket machines at stations to ensure they have a valid ticket to travel;**
- d) Promoting and looking at options to increase the range of services available from the booking office – for example some areas such as Merseyside use rail station ticket offices to provide attraction tickets and tourist information at key locations;**
- e) Undertaking a review of ticket office opening hours so that they offer a consistent and easy-to-use option for passengers;**
- f) Further roll out of ticket barriers;**
- g) Ensuring that ticket barriers, where provided, are in use consistently;**

³⁸ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/putting-rail-information-in-the-public-domain>

³⁹ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/presenting-righttime-performance-information-to-rail-passengers>

- h) Looking at options to provide better visibility of staff and ticket checking on-train, in particular to ensure that passengers undertaking intermediate journeys away from major stations are likely to have their ticket checked; and**
- i) Continuing and developing arrangements to prevent and deter ticketless travel to ensure that passengers are strongly encouraged to purchase a ticket, with staff available to support the process.**

Considering the options above and any other ideas you may have, in order of importance please list what you think are the priorities for the new operator to focus on to:

- a) ensure it is as easy as possible to pay for your journey; and**
- b) deter people from travelling without a valid ticket?**

Please provide your reasons and state if you are aware of any specific locations where it is difficult to buy tickets or where people travel without a valid ticket.

4.13 Ticketing

4.13.1 Making buying a ticket easier

The next West Midlands franchise must make ticket purchase easier for passengers, many of whom are confused by the complexity of the fares system.

Clear information about the validity of tickets and any applicable restrictions must be readily available. Passengers should be able to buy the most appropriate ticket for their intended journey, regardless of whether this is purchased at a ticket office, on-line, at a ticket machine or through any other method.

Passengers should be given a range of options for ticket purchase so they can choose the method which is simplest and most convenient for them. Provision of a ticket vending machine (TVM) at every station will be one means of enabling this. However, to ensure maximum access these need to be capable of accepting cash as well as card payments.

The value of Permit to Travel (PERTIS) machines, which we acknowledge are increasingly a thing of the past, lies in providing passengers with evidence of an attempt to pay and reassurance against allegations of ticketless travel. If there is to be greater reliance on TVMs, or other methods, then some fundamental safeguards must be put in place. These include:

- ease of use and clear details of about the validity of, and any restrictions applicable to, tickets offered
- offer of a comprehensive range of tickets and/or tell passengers what to do should the ticket they want not be available
- capability of remote monitoring so that any faults are notified and can be rectified.

In addition revenue protection strategies must set out:

- procedures for alerting revenue protection staff if there is a fault with the machine
- systems for monitoring queue length – passengers should not be penalised for queue lengths in excess of the three/five minutes targets set out in the ticketing and settlement agreement (TSA).

Transport Focus’s research has identified a number of issues with both ticket vending machines (TVMs) and websites – much of which was reflected in Government’s own Fares and Ticketing Review consultation and in the industry’s own retail information code of practice. Key issues to focus on include:

- printing any restrictions on passengers’ tickets to remove confusion over validity
- displaying outward and return ticket restrictions on TVMs prior to a passenger committing to purchase
- making it impossible to buy an Advance ticket on the internet at a higher price than the ‘walk up’ fare available on the same train.

More details of the problems passengers experience are set out, with recommendations about how to improve retailing through these channels, in our research into ticket vending machine usability⁴⁰ and ticket retailing website usability.⁴¹

The new franchise should provide a wider range of tickets for passengers. Developments in ticketing such as smart-cards or contactless bank cards and mobile telephone products should be incorporated into the franchise. The franchise should also require the introduction of innovative new products such as carnet style tickets that will enable passengers who cannot benefit from season ticket discounts to achieve some economies from repeat travel. Schemes to spread the cost of annual season tickets should also be available.

The key is to ensure that passengers have all the necessary information on which to make an ‘informed purchase’.

4.13.2 Smart ticketing

We know from our research programme smarter travel⁴², that passengers across modes and throughout the country do see real benefits in smart ticketing.

In a project we undertook at the start of the programme and which has been reinforced in subsequent work, we identified that when thinking about the

⁴⁰ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/ticket-vending-machine-usability-qualitative-research>

⁴¹ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/ticket-retailing-website-usability>

⁴² <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/smarter-travel>

introduction of smart ticketing, and preferences for how this will work, it is clear that there are seven key attributes that drive attitudes and views:

- **Value for money**
Value for money is a key driver for ticket choice at the moment, and remains an important factor when considering smart ticketing. Participants expect that smart ticketing will involve some kind of cost saving either via cheaper fares or new cost effective tickets and products.
- **Convenient**
Smart ticketing needs to be a convenient option that is easy to use. Participants look for a ticketing system that made life easier, rather than complicating their commute. When thinking about convenience, participants want a system where it is easy to purchase tickets, to manage their smart ticket account and use their ticket.
- **Simple**
Simplicity is important, especially for those unfamiliar with smart technology or smart ticketing. These people are most likely to need education regarding how smart ticketing will work, and a simple system is likely to support them in moving to smart ticketing.
- **Secure**
Participants raise some concerns about the security of smart ticketing. When thinking about smart cards, people expect their personal data will be kept safe— especially any details that will be printed and visible on the card. When thinking about mobile ticketing and contactless, many express concerns around the safety and security of their mobile phone or credit card, and the potential for theft when using these. However a benefit of smart ticketing is that the ticket details are thought to be safer – for instance if a card is lost or stolen then it will be easier to get the product cancelled and reissued.
- **Flexible**
Alongside a convenient and easy to use system, participants want smart ticketing to be flexible. They want the ability to choose and purchase new products and tickets that offer flexible travel options. They also want flexibility with regards to managing their smart ticketing account to include being able to make ticket purchases at the last minute and being able to upload tickets at a range of stations.
- **Tailored management**
In addition to new products that would enable participants to tailor their smart ticket products to their needs, tailoring is also desired with regards to managing their smart ticketing account. It is clear that many seek the ability to manage online, and via an App. Participants want the ability to choose how they prefer to manage their account (online, App, text message), and

reassurances that this will be tailored to be compatible with the technology they own (e.g. Apple and android compliant).

- **Leading edge**

Participants are clear that the introduction of smart ticketing is a shift into a more technology-focused way of ticketing. With this in mind they are keen that the technology used is forward-thinking. This is particularly noted by those who are familiar with smart technology and smart ticketing, and who see this as an opportunity for train operating companies (TOCs) to lead the way in ticketing technology rather than replicate existing systems.

Those whose commute involved travelling within central London are familiar with, and often use, the Oyster card system. These participants have a better understanding of how smart ticketing works and find it easier to generate a range of benefits and drawbacks of a smart ticketing system. And indeed, for frequent users of the Underground or London Buses an integrated system was considered 'ideal and essential.' These passengers are keen to avoid holding a plethora of smartcards all covering different modes and routes of travel; one solution for all was sought.

Whilst participants are keen that TOCs introduce smart ticketing, there are some reservations about whether TOCs currently have the capabilities and capacity to do so. Negative commuter experiences of delays and congestion means that some lacked trust in TOCs to deliver smart ticketing.

Across the research, experience and use of smart technology such as smart mobile phones and tablets clearly affected views on smart ticketing. Those who are familiar with, and confident in the capabilities and functions of smart technology, typically express greater comfort with and expectations for a smart ticketing system.

We would urge any operator to design their smart ticketing systems with this in mind. It is difficult to get passengers to break existing habits of ticket purchase, and they are relatively unforgiving when things do not deliver as promised. Implementing a poorly designed or confusing system will not result in high levels of uptake or satisfaction. In all our smart ticketing work, we reinforce the importance of:

- designing good systems, where passengers are consulted from the outset and their views are fully incorporated
- making sure that communications to both customers and staff are clear, easily-accessible, consistent and comprehensive
- ensuring that staff are fully trained when systems are introduced, so that they can sympathetically deal with any issues, problems or queries that their passengers may have.

Smartcards are certainly one of many potential enablers of making the experience of using public transport better for passengers, but in their own right they are not a

solution to the difficulties passengers experience in terms of capacity and information.

Well-designed smart schemes could potentially enable passengers to choose quieter or slower (stopping) train services, incentivised to do so by a lower fare. The gates would be able to identify which train was used and charge a fare accordingly – whether deducting from a Pay As You Go balance or by giving a partial credit back for a pre-paid ‘standard’ fare.

Integrated information, through apps, personalised updates and other online sources, could be used in many ways to assist passengers, for instance:

- information on which trains are busier or less busy
- live running information, alerting passengers to delays and issues
- onward journey planning
- push notifications, e.g. information that the passenger’s usual train (known via their smart travel record) is cancelled and suggesting alternatives
- offering last minute special tickets, if there is excess capacity on particular services or advising passengers that they would be better to purchase another ticket type
- advising in advance of engineering work likely to affect that passenger, based on their travel patterns.

4.13.3 Ticket offices

The possibility of promoting and looking at options to increase the range of services available from the booking office seems largely positive. Initiatives such as this can make stations busier, and potentially increase convenience for passengers and the local community. It may also make a positive contribution to the costs and sustainability of operating ticket offices.

Should ancillary booking office activities take-off, then the implications for queue lengths will need to be monitored to ensure there are no adverse impacts on passengers’ ability to purchase tickets in a timely fashion.

Undertaking a review of ticket office opening hours within the context of ensuring efficient use of resources is also understandable. However, the needs of passengers in each locality should take priority over any arbitrary decisions about consistency across the network.

Section 4.3.2 above covers the importance to passengers of staffing and information at stations. Ticket office staff not only sell tickets but also provide advice and reassurance to passengers, especially during disruption. It will be important that any review into retailing hours takes into account the wider benefits from having a staff presence rather than just the number of tickets sold.

4.13.4 Ticketless travel

Research⁴³ has shown that passengers find the issue of fare evasion very frustrating. There is a strong sense of injustice amongst those who have paid for a ticket when some passengers are known to be travelling for free. They also felt that this reduced the amount of money available for investment.

Passengers believed that the main solution to fare evasion would be to make better provision for the purchase of tickets at stations and on board, and to implement better checking procedures and enforcement. This must include:

- clarity and consistency over when it was permissible to buy a ticket on board a train – the current system is felt to be too arbitrary
- managing ticket queues effectively (at TVMs and offices)
- providing ticket restrictions in an easy to access form and in plain English
- providing the passenger with verification of permission to travel without a ticket
- providing the passenger with verification of attempt to purchase a ticket if a card is declined due to bank security measures or signal issues.

Consideration of further roll out of ticket barriers and ensuring that ticket barriers, where provided, are in use consistently can make a positive contribution to ensuring that all travellers pay for the journey they are making. It is important that there are sufficient numbers of rostered staff to ensure that barriers in place are used effectively and not left open. Gate-line staff also provide the visible staff presence that passengers value.

There need to be sufficient barriers to cope with the number of passengers passing through them, particularly at times of peak flow. Where problems arise staff should be empowered to take appropriate action to ease congestion at the gates.

Should remote staffing for barriers be under consideration then there will need to be proper consultation to look at demand, the suitability of this approach for each locality and any implications for disabled passengers.

Transport Focus believes ticketless travel is an important issue and one that needs addressing. Passengers who avoid paying for their ticket are in effect being subsidised by the vast majority of fare-paying passengers. However, the revenue protection strategy must provide safeguards for those who make an innocent mistake and whose intention was never to defraud the system. We believe this requires:

- Clear consistent guidelines explaining when staff should show discretion in the enforcement of penalties. For example, when passengers do not have their railcard with them.

⁴³ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/passenger-views-of-northern-and-transpennine-rail-franchises>

- Commitment not to go straight to any form of criminal prosecution unless they suspect (or have proof) that there was intent to defraud.
- Penalties that are proportionate to the actual loss suffered by the operator.
- Operators that work with others in the industry to create a national system that is transparent and supports the honest passenger who makes a mistake.

We recommend that the operator develops and publicly consults on its revenue protection strategy. In doing so it should be mindful of the recommendations within our *Ticket to Ride*⁴⁴ publications.

Question 14 – Personal security throughout the journey

Q14: What could be done to improve security to make your train journey better and encourage more people to use rail services? This could include on the way to or at the station or on board the train.

Where possible please provide specific details and your reasons why.

4.14 Safety and security

In autumn 2015 the NRPS asked passengers if they had cause to worry about personal security in the last six months whilst making a train journey. For London Midland nine per cent of passengers said yes. This was the same as the figure nationally and slightly lower than that of the sector, which stood at 10 per cent.

Passengers were asked to identify the reason for that worry, at the station as well as on the train. At the station the highest cause for concern for London Midland passengers in spring 2014 was anti-social behaviour by other people at 53 per cent, followed by lack of station staff at 43 per cent. Findings were similar on the train, with the highest cause for concern again being anti-social behaviour by other people at 67 per cent, followed by lack of on-train staff at 39 per cent. These findings emphasise the importance of a visible staff presence to reassure passengers.

In spring 2015 passengers were asked a slightly different question, ‘did other passengers’ behaviour give you cause to worry or make you feel uncomfortable during your journey?’. For London Midland, eight per cent said yes compared to nine per cent nationally. Commuters had the highest level of concern with 10 per cent saying yes while business and leisure passengers were at seven per cent and six per cent respectively.

NRPS then went on to ask those passengers what caused them to worry or feel uncomfortable. London Midland passengers expressing concern in spring 2015 largely attributed it to anti-social behaviour, but more specifically: feet on seats (59

⁴⁴ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/ticket-to-ride-full-report-may-2012>
<http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/ticket-to-ride-an-update>

per cent); rowdy behaviour (36 per cent); music being played loudly (31 per cent); and passengers drinking/under the influence of alcohol (30 per cent).

In addition to the above, passengers were asked in autumn 2013⁴⁵ whether concerns about personal security have prevented them from making trips by train. On London Midland four per cent said that they either travelled by another mode or did not make the journey they wanted to, due to concerns over personal security. This is the same as the figure nationally.

Whilst passengers tell us that technology is no substitute for a visible, trained and engaged staff, Transport Focus would recommend that where a staff presence cannot be provided, bidders should confirm they will provide CCTV and linked help-points at all stations. These should meet the current British Transport Police 'Output Requirement Specification' for CCTV and be linked into BTP's CCTV hub. Where possible, CCTV should also be linked into local authority systems, which would allow suspects to be tracked beyond the station footprint.

Stations that are unstaffed when trains are scheduled to call at them should be prioritised for such investment. Ideally the CCTV would be 'live' monitored but where this is not possible CCTV footage should be retained for at least 31 days to allow 'after the event' enquiries to be made. We believe that every station should have appropriate technology to enhance personal security, although we acknowledge that it may be necessary to exempt very low footfall stations in order to ensure best use of limited resources. Though, it is often at those stations with fewer passengers present that perceptions of personal security are lowest.

Transport Focus supports the Secure Stations Scheme and would urge the winning bidder to ensure that all of the stations on their network are accredited – not just those with the highest footfall.

Where station car parking is provided, car parks should also be accredited under the Safer Parking Scheme administered by the British Parking Association. Research undertaken by the Rail Safety and Standards Board suggests that where Secure Station and Safer Parking Accreditation are provided in tandem, the number of crimes committed is significantly lower.

Transport Focus recommends that franchise bidders be instructed to make use of the best practice guides on managing the different aspects of personal security, produced by the Rail Safety and Standards Board⁴⁶.

⁴⁵ This was the last wave in which this question was asked, so there is no data for Autumn 2014 and beyond.

⁴⁶ For example: A Good Practice Guide for Managing Personal Security on Board Trains

Question 15 – Good service to make rail attractive

Q15: What represents good service for you on your rail journey and what could be improved or introduced to make you feel more valued as a customer and encourage you to recommend the railway to others?

Please state whether you are referring to long or short distance services and give reasons including any relevant examples of outstanding customer service experiences, related or unrelated to passenger rail services.

4.15 Customer service

We believe that empowering frontline staff to proactively address passenger needs and giving them the authority and tools to respond to issues where and when they arise will do much to improve perceptions of customer service.

Table 6, below, shows NRPS scores for London Midland and its building blocks on two key customer service factors. It also shows how this compares to the typology average and best in class. There is a significant gap in all cases between the level of satisfaction with London Midland and the level of satisfaction with the best in class. We recommend that efforts are made to identify what and how the class leaders are delivering in these areas and the specification encourages adoption of similar practices.

The focus for good customer service should not solely be on staff at stations and on trains. Customer service is about every aspect of interaction the passenger has with the operator. Provision of adequate journey planning tools, a useful, easy to use website and a helpful, knowledgeable contact centre are all vital to the overall experience. If a customer has cause to make a complaint then how it is handled can have a substantial impact on overall impressions of customer service (see section 4.20.5 for our detailed recommendations on complaints handling).

Passengers' experiences on rail are clearly also influenced by the services they experience in the wider aspects of their lives. Our work on trust (as outlined in section 3.5) identified a hierarchy of need. The base level relates to delivery of the core service and is fundamental for building any degree of trust. Beyond this, the middle tier emphasises communication and customer service, whilst the higher levels rely on a more individualised experience and a sense of being valued.

The qualitative research found that, if London Midland did more to show that they valued their customers and rewarded loyalty, for example through loyalty schemes, special offers and discounts, trust and relationship could be improved⁴⁷.

The specification should encourage the next operator to demonstrate how they will rise to the challenge of delivering improved customer service and build strong and positive relationships with passengers.

⁴⁷ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/london-midland-rail-franchise-passenger-research>

Table 6 Customer service factors, NRPS Autumn 2015, percentage satisfied

	The attitudes and helpfulness of the staff at station	The helpfulness and attitude of staff on train
London Midland	77	63
LSE average	74	56
LSE best in class	87 (Heathrow Express)	86 (Heathrow Express)
London Commuter		
London Commuter	67	63
Long commute average	75	60
Long commute best in class	86 (ScotRail – Urban)	84 (ScotRail – Urban)
West Coast		
West Coast	87	68
Interurban average	79	79
Interurban best in class	89 (First TransPennine Express - North West)	86 (Arriva Trains Wales - Inter Urban)
West Midlands		
West Midlands	79	61
Short commute average	74	56
Short commute best in class	93 (Merseyrail – Northern)	96 (Northern Rail - Tyne Tees & Wear)

Question 16 - Information

Q16: How could the provision of information on rail services be improved and what additional information would be of use to you when planning or making your journey e.g. seat availability, journey times, and connection information?

Where possible please provide reasons for your answers.

4.16 Passenger information

The provision of good quality, clear and accurate information is crucial to passengers and fundamentally linked to the quality of experience at every stage of the journey. This importance is evidenced by our research which shows various information-related factors appearing as high priorities for improvement.

We recommend adoption of an increasingly open approach to making data and information about all aspects of the franchise available in the public domain. A

commitment to disaggregation of data will also make it easier for passengers to find information that is more relevant to the journeys they make and meaningful to them.

Other sections of this response address:

- information needs at stations and when starting/ending journeys (4.3.2.1)
- the importance of transparent information in journey planning and managing capacity (4.5.1)
- the need for engagement and consultation in relation to timetable development and changes (4.7.1)
- the particular needs for information during planned and unplanned disruption (4.10 and Appendix 4)
- the need for comprehensive information and clarity about options and restrictions when purchasing tickets (4.13.1)
- giving rail passengers access to performance figures relevant to their services (4.20.1)
- monitoring and reporting on a range of service quality and performance measures (4.20.2).

Given the coverage detailed above, the remainder of our response to this question is largely focused on the broader issue of passenger engagement.

4.16.1 Passenger and stakeholder communication and engagement

Central to improving the passenger experience of rail services are effective mechanisms for passenger and stakeholder engagement, particularly for gathering intelligence on local aspirations and developments, and for consulting on future proposals. In section 3.5 we also identified the need for train operators to improve passenger perceptions of the relationship elements of their interactions in order to build greater trust in the rail industry.

In 2013 Transport Focus published the findings of research into passenger understanding of the franchise process and their appetite for engagement with it⁴⁸.

It is clear from this work that passengers have unanswered desires to contribute their thoughts, both about priorities for franchise specifications and the performance of incumbents. There is also a desire for greater two-way communication about what each franchise promises – and what is actually achieved.

Our research⁴⁹, exploring reactions to the Customer Reports required as part of new franchises, found that passengers welcomed this additional channel of engagement. The Customer Report provides a clear statement of promises and addresses passengers' desire to understand what a new franchise will deliver and what they

⁴⁸ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/giving-passengers-a-voice-in-rail-services>

⁴⁹ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/what-passengers-want-from-customer-reports>

can expect over the months and years to come. This is a positive step towards a train operator building a relationship with passengers and generating trust.

The recent qualitative research amongst passengers of London Midland provides useful insight into their experiences and aspirations. We hope that the findings will inform the franchise specification, bidder proposals and agreement about what is to be delivered.

When negotiations with the successful bidder are concluded we recommend that there is a clear public statement about key elements of the franchise, particularly how they address passenger requirements. It is important that the contract announcement does not simply cover the 'good news' and high profile initiatives but also covers any aspects of the new franchise which may have the potential to be detrimental. This would demonstrate an appropriate level of transparency and avoid the negative impact and distrust that can follow when less good news emerges further down the line.

We also recommend RE should look to publish the redacted version of the Franchise Agreement and associated documents as soon as possible after the winning bidder is announced, and certainly by the time the new franchise commences.

The new franchisee should be required to demonstrate clear plans for an engagement strategy that accommodates the needs of different passengers. Transport Focus advocates that a wide range of means should be employed to communicate with passengers and wider communities to allow people to access information and provide input in the ways that are most suited to each individual or group. This should not overlook the various needs of passengers with disabilities.

In common with other recent franchises, Transport Focus recommends the specification requires the establishment of a Customer and Communities Investment Fund, the production of an initial customer report and a commitment to regular updates, or revisions, at key stages of the franchise. These reports should include information about performance on the factors important to passengers and, particularly where targets are missed or results fall, plans for improvement.

The contract should also require the next incumbent to establish mechanisms that, at the appropriate time, will be used to alert passengers to the prospect of changes as a result of the forthcoming competition when the franchise approaches its end.

Question 17 – Local identity and branding

Q17: Should the railway have its own identity representing the areas it serves rather than the train company that operates the services e.g. a specific brand on services that run within West Midlands area?

Please give us a reason for your response to help us understand your view.

4.17 Brand identity

Our research⁵⁰ suggests that there is generally little ‘brand awareness’ amongst passengers other than for some of the longer-distance services. It also identifies a number of assurances that need to be provided for passengers to believe that devolution is appropriate for their rail service.

The research with London Midland passengers similarly indicated little sense of relationship with the operator. However, many did perceive this to be the local service provider.

The most important issue is the effectiveness of the train service rather than structure or branding. Passengers certainly do not want to see change for change’s sake, nor huge amounts of money spent on a rebranding exercise. So if this option is to be pursued then it will be important to set out to passengers how rebranding will make a genuine difference.

We recognise the increasing moves towards devolution nationally, and the desire of WMR for rail to be integrated into wider plans for the travel-to-work area in support of a thriving regional economy. The views of local passengers and stakeholders should determine if, and how, plans for specific brand development are taken forward.

Question area D – a considerate, sustainable railway

Question 18 - Local communities and the railway

Q18: How could communities, businesses and/or other organisations within the public, private and voluntary sectors be encouraged to play an active part in the running of the railway stations or services in their area?

4.18 Local community and business involvement

Key opportunities to enhance service provision can be realised through funding channels and sponsorship that may not otherwise be available to train operators – from PTEs, county councils, LEPs, local businesses and match funding.

Educational schemes which link with local schools through art projects using local artists, organising visits to the station and links with older volunteers can successfully raise awareness of the railway, familiarity with local services and by linking

⁵⁰ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/passenger-views-of-northern-and-transpennine-rail-franchises>

curriculum-based learning into rail projects, promote future local rail use with the children. Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership (CRP)⁵¹ has some excellent examples of working with schools and colleges.

Event sponsorship is a useful tool in encouraging infrequent or new users. Local tourism is enhanced through promotion of walks which start and finish at local train stations, publicised through leaflets and websites. These initiatives can also support service enhancements. Again, Abbey Line Community Rail CRP has developed a programme of walks⁵² that start and finish at stations to attract people to use the railway.

Involvement of local businesses is achieved in a variety of ways. The strongest way of getting firms involved (particularly larger ones) is where there is commercial benefit through joint promotions, sponsoring projects or environmental initiatives such as green travel plans which show the company in a positive light.

More ambitious business models are also developing in other parts of the rail network to create commercial conditions in a way that enables them to prosper and to deliver benefits to the regional economy.

4.18.1 The value of Community Rail Partnerships

Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) bring distinctive attributes to local rail compared with other parts of the national rail network, including:

- creating a sense of involvement
- information and marketing activities
- implementing local schemes
- providing a focus for investment.

The 2015 report on the Value of Community Rail Partnerships⁵³ shows that they can be extremely successful. Focusing on the regional and local level, results can be seen in increased footfall at stations along CRP lines.

The report goes on to show that the costs of running CRPs are less than the value of additional revenues earned by their lines and they therefore present a commercial case.

4.18.2 Passenger growth

The Value of Community Rail Partnerships report also shows high level sustained year on year growth in passengers travelling on community rail lines and local rail services in recent years with community rail routes growing by 2.8 per cent each year more than regional lines.

⁵¹ <http://www.abbeyline.org.uk/schools.htm>

⁵² <http://www.abbeyline.org.uk/walks.htm>

⁵³ http://www.acorp.uk.com/Assets/Values2015/140916_Value%20of%20CRPs%20and%20volunteeri ng_final%20draft%20v3.17.pdf

Recent modelling of rail passenger journeys, though, has underestimated the growth of trips on community rail services, as compared with the trends of the last ten years:

- The National Transport Model (published 2011) predicted growth on Regional rail services through to 2030 of only 1 per cent per year.
- The Network Rail Strategic Business Plan and the Rolling Stock Strategy Report (issued 2013) uses growth rates of 3-4 per cent per annum.
- The Network Rail LTPP draft Regional Urban Market Study (2013) predicts growth no higher than 3 per cent per year for the next 10 years and through to 2043.

The Value of Community Rail partnerships report found evidence of ticketless travel, with volunteer passenger counts recording substantially higher numbers than the LENNON data. This indicates that work to increase rail use is offset by lack of revenue protection and means that on some lines growth is underestimated which could have a detrimental effect on future investment decisions.

The report also found that train capacity can be a constraint on continuing growth of rail use, currently limiting more than 50 per cent of the Community Rail Partnerships involved in the study.

Transport Focus recommends:

- greater transparency and sharing of data and methodologies by DfT, Network Rail and train operators with CRPs
- CRPs are commissioned to carry out and submit regular passenger counts, to ensure more accurate passenger data is available for forecasting, especially for capacity and rolling stock requirements.

4.18.3 Development and expansion opportunities

Passengers expect the stations they use to be welcoming and attractive. Local involvement, typically by 'friends of' groups and supported by the railway industry and local government, can achieve significant improvements in the attractiveness of stations, in stimulating community engagement with the railway and the use of redundant station buildings by local businesses and organisations, including those involved in local tourism.

Passengers expect transport to be integrated – which should, of course, mean that it is more effective in attracting users as well as being more useful. Increasing 'localism' should help this task, which will improve accessibility to local areas and help with the development of 'gateway' stations to access areas of natural beauty along rural lines.

Innovative marketing schemes have become the hallmark for community rail. Local enthusiasm is a powerful tool in generating links with visitor attractions that can be accessed from local stations.

The Value of Community Partnerships report found that some key aspects of how CRPs boost rail use are:

- using local knowledge, often lacking as train operating companies become more centralised
- adopting and improving stations so they are attractive rather than “no go” places, thereby unlocking demand
- providing a focus for, and enabling, improvement schemes
- overcoming low levels of knowledge about rail journey opportunities and, for people unfamiliar with rail, generating confidence and interest in how to use the network
- engaging with young people, essential for growing the market
- being innovative and making a little money go a long way, in which Partnerships and volunteer groups are highly skilled.

The report also suggests that security of funding, the employment of a CRP Officer, good communications and marketing, and creating productive partnerships are key to the success of a CRP.

Prof Paul Salveson’s paper on The Sustainable Branch Line⁵⁴ goes further in saying that CRPs have an excellent record of winning back passengers to rural lines through innovative marketing and community involvement. Adding that it is possible to develop a scenario whereby such partnerships take on more and more ‘peripheral’ commercial activities and build up commercial expertise which – at a future stage – enables them to take on actual train operation. A model could be developed in consultation with local communities to establish a steady progression of input, moving towards greater autonomy in relation to developing activities.

Volunteers can provide important back-up through ‘additionality’ – looking after station gardens, acting as conductors on the bus services, and assisting with catering services.

Transport Focus recommends:

- Funding a community rail post at senior level, with appropriate support, to work towards these goals, promote and co-ordinate activities across community rail lines and services in the West Midlands, and provide liaison with county councils/LEPs/LTBs.

⁵⁴ <http://www.paulsalveson.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/The-Sustainable-Branch-Line1.doc>

- A formalised group to meet periodically for policy/investment discussion, to include the operator, Network Rail, DfT, CRPs, county council/LEP/LTB representatives, Transport Focus and other partners as appropriate.
- Supporting wider community involvement through station adoption and user group schemes, particularly to boost the local stations environment and improve passenger satisfaction, and the re-establishment of community ambassador initiatives to widen the reach of the railway beyond traditional boundaries.

Question 19 – The wider context

Q19: Based on your experience or knowledge of the railway, how do you think train services, railway stations and supporting services should be delivered so that they consider and support the environment, equality and the communities/areas they operate within?

4.19 Supporting the environment, equality and communities

Section 4.18 addresses linkages between the railway and local communities.

4.19.1 Accessibility, the Equality Act 2010 and minor works fund

We expect the specification to include requirements to comply with equalities and discrimination legislation and to produce a Disabled People's Protection Policy (DPPP). Transport Focus also recommends a minor works fund and advocates that consultation with relevant groups should include inviting suggestions about how this money might best be spent to meet identified needs.

In addition to the provisions set out in DPPP guidance, Transport Focus believes the franchise specification should also require the following provisions:

- Scooter policy – ensure that a suitable scooter acceptance scheme is in place for smaller, lighter and more manoeuvrable machines – e.g. Scootercards. Blanket bans are no longer acceptable – always understanding that some models will be too wide/heavy ever to be accepted on to trains.
- Provide a priority seat card scheme (as initiated by Southern and now adopted as good practice by a number of operators) to help passengers demonstrate a specific need for a seat, backed up by publicity on stations and greater prominence made of which seats are priority seats so that they are easily located and recognised. This is especially important in the case of trains where no reservation facility is available.
- Clarify the priority of use of priority seating and the groups considered eligible for it.
- Clearly clarify priority of usage in 'shared' spaces – i.e. wheelchairs have absolute priority over prams.

- Provide assistance cards which disabled passengers can show to staff to explain their disability – e.g. hearing-impaired, speech-impaired, learning difficulties, so that staff can react and provide the necessary additional assistance.
- Comprehensive Passenger Assist monitoring – proper management, for example, perhaps the number of assistance requests delivered, rather than satisfaction, which can be deceptive. This could be included in the Passenger’s Charter and the DPPP.
- Best use should be made of the management information gained from Passenger Assist – e.g. enabling TOCs to plan assistance provision better.
- Training of staff – especially front-line staff in immediate customer contact, whether face-to face or by telephone.
- Examine all possibilities to improve station accessibility: e.g. induction loops; help points; adjustable-height counters; automatic doors etc.

Question 20 – Other issues

Q20: If there are any additional areas that you think it is important for us to consider that have not already been addressed in this consultation please explain them here.

4.20.1 Performance and reliability

London Midland passengers’ priorities for improvement ranks four factors relating to performance and reliability within the top ten; more trains arriving on time (index 192), less frequent major unplanned disruptions (index 175), fewer train cancellations (index 151) and less disruption due to engineering works (index 100).

Table 7 below shows fairly consistent satisfaction with punctuality and reliability across London Midland and its building blocks (between 76 and 78 per cent). However, commuters and those travelling in the peak are significantly less satisfied, at 63 per cent.

Table 7 Punctuality and reliability, NRPS Autumn 2015, percentage satisfied: London Midland, Building Blocks, Peak/Off-Peak, Commuter/Business/ Leisure

LSE	London Midland	London Commuter	West Coast	West Midlands
75	76	76	78	76
Peak	Off peak	Commuter	Business	Leisure
63	77	63	79	88

Figure 5, below, shows the trend for punctuality of the component service groups and the London Midland operation as a whole, as measured by the industry measure of punctuality.⁵⁵ At operator level there has been slight improvement after a period of decline, but this is driven by improved performance on the regional service group. London South East performance is significantly worse.

Figure 5 London Midland PPM for operator and service groups

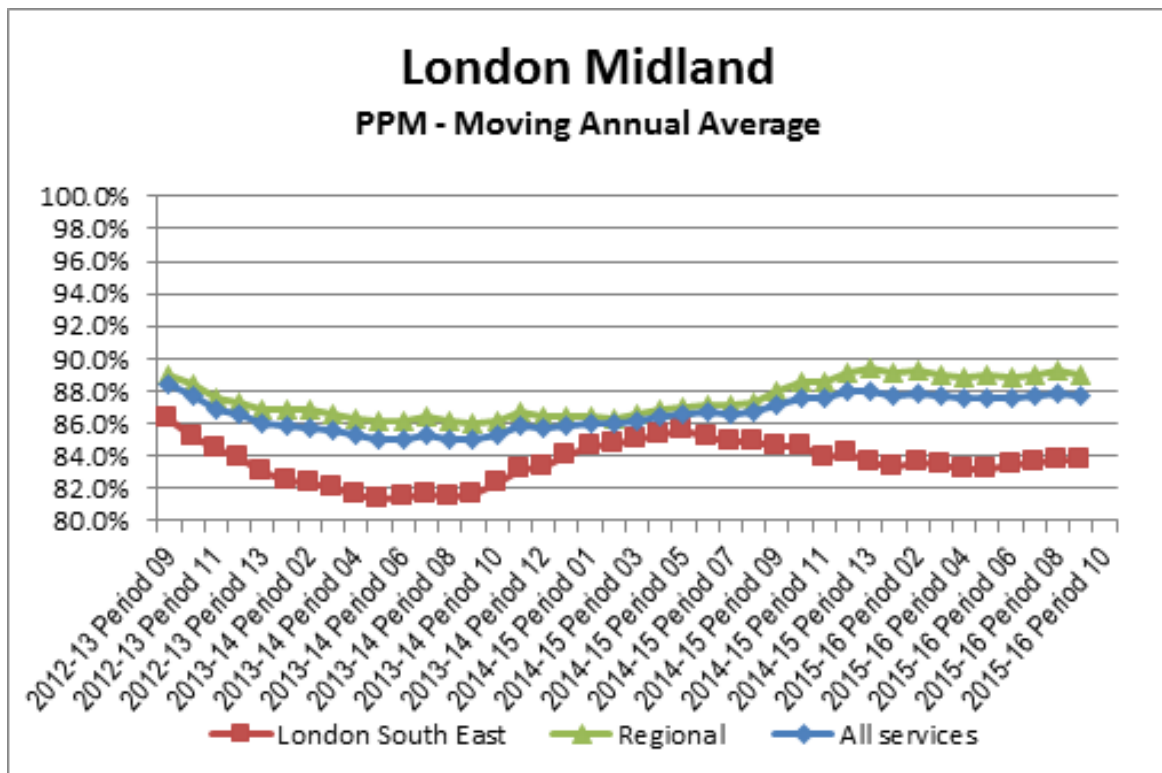


Figure 6, below, shows a welcome declining trend, albeit still with room for improvement, in the industry measure of cancellations and significant lateness (trains over 30 minutes beyond scheduled arrival time at final destination) following a period of poor performance.

⁵⁵ This standard, the Public Performance Measure – or PPM - regards trains arriving at their final destination within five minutes of scheduled time (or ten minutes for longer distance services) as punctual

Figure 6 London Midland Cancellations and Significant Lateness (MAA)

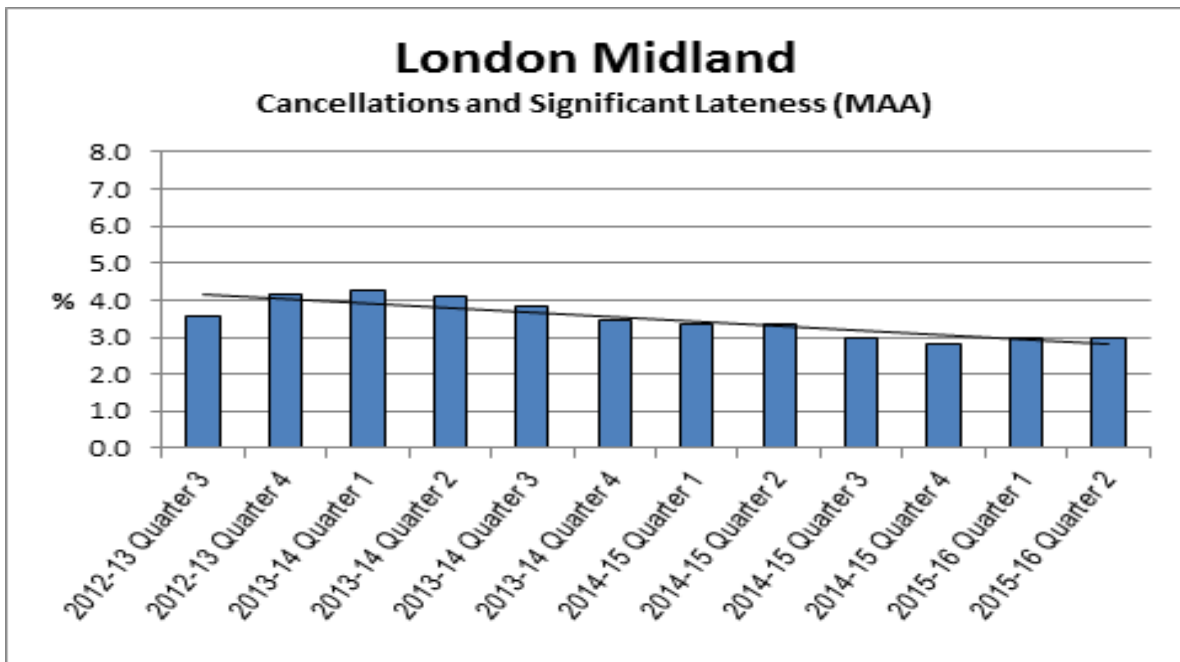


Figure 7 London Midland PPM and Right Time

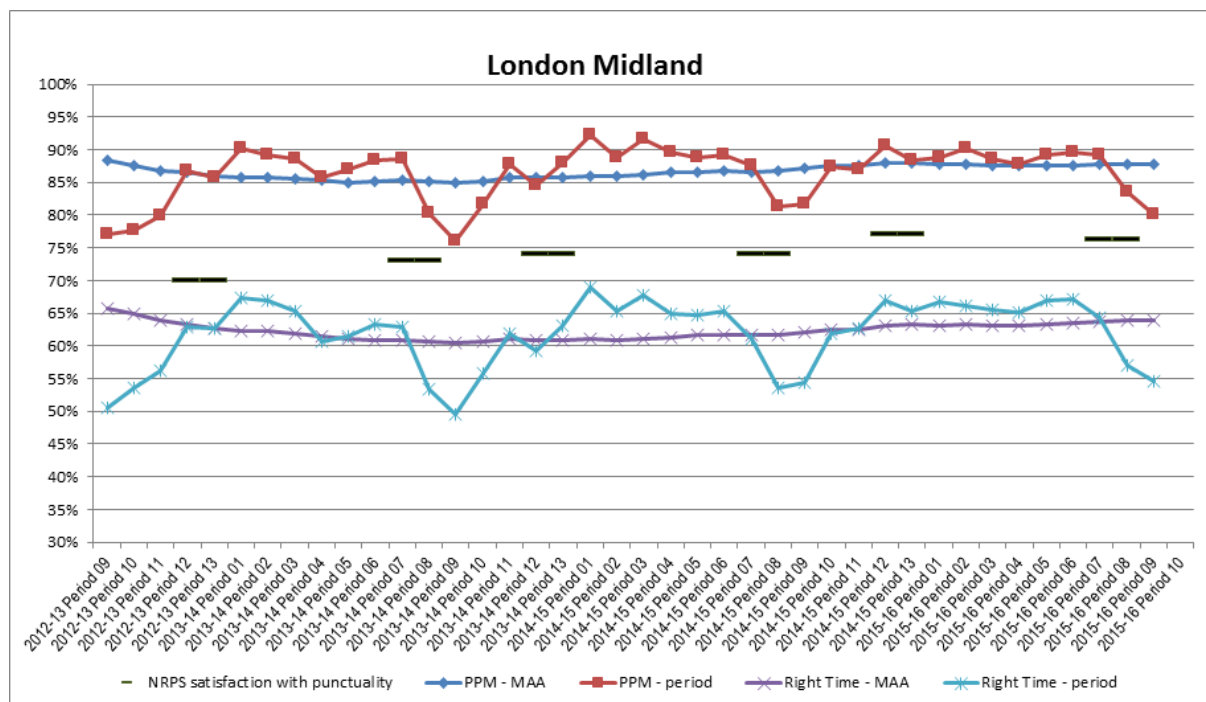


Figure 7, above, shows a comparison between PPM and Right Time (trains arriving at their terminating station early or within 59 seconds of schedule) and passengers satisfaction with punctuality. It demonstrates the wide gap between the industry measure and the reality of the performance that passengers experience.

Our research clearly identifies the importance of punctuality and reliability to passengers. We therefore emphasise the absolute need for the next franchise specification to demand improvements in this crucial aspect of operations.

We recommend that the specification sets out a requirement for a strong focus on delivering excellent operational performance and ensuring a culture of genuine transparency about how well things are going. As well as helping engender trust among passengers and stakeholders, we believe transparency will of itself increase the incentive on the operator to drive up performance. It should be noted that 'on time'/'right time' punctuality is what matters to passengers and not whether a train is within PPM.

Specifically, we feel there should be:

1. Targets to improve PPM, 'on time'/'right time' and cancellations across all routes. Reliance on service group averages, let alone a whole TOC average, risks exposing passengers on individual routes to poor performance.
2. Targets for PPM and 'on time'/'right time' at key intermediate stations in addition to at the train destinations.

Measuring performance at the destination station alone runs the risk that a large number of passengers are late even though the train does not show as such. This is a particular problem on longer distance routes with numerous sub-markets and relatively few end-to-end passengers. But even on shorter routes, including commuter routes, punctuality based on measurement at destination can be markedly at odds with the experience of passengers using intermediate stations. The impact of late running at intermediate stations can be dramatic when passengers are making connections with other trains or with buses.

3. A requirement to make historic train performance information easy to obtain and understand. Passengers should be able to view the performance of individual trains they catch (or a group of trains) between the stations they use. When journey planning, the performance record of individual trains should be one of the elements presented to assist passenger decision-making.
4. A requirement to report publicly the number of trains each period that appear in the public timetable, but are excluded from the 'plan of the day' and therefore do not count officially as cancellations. The fact that any cancellation – if declared by 22:00 the day before – does not appear in performance statistics fuels many passengers' underlying suspicion and mistrust of the industry. Being open about what is going on would help.

To reinforce these points, our 2015 research⁵⁶ shows the high value that passengers place on performance and the provision of a service that they can rely on. We also know through our work on the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) that punctuality is the main driver of overall passenger satisfaction. In order to better understand the relationship we have taken a more in depth look at the correlation between satisfaction with punctuality and actual performance across a number of different train companies. Overall we found a clear picture of:

- Average lateness experienced by passengers being worse than that recorded for train services. This is because of the effect of cancellations and because many trains that are on time at their destination are late at intermediate stations. As PPM measures performance at the final station it is possible for passengers en-route to be late arriving at their station only for the 'empty' train to arrive on time – in other words the train is on time despite most of the passengers being late.
- Passenger satisfaction with punctuality reduces by between two and three percentage points with every minute of delay.
- Passengers' notice delay well before the technical threshold of delay. Commuters notice lateness after one minute rather than the five minutes allowed; while business and leisure users tend to change their level of satisfaction with punctuality after a delay of four to six minutes.

This shows that passengers do not view a train arriving up to 5 or 10 minutes after its scheduled time as being on-time. And that a significant degree of passenger satisfaction is 'lost' when trains are officially 'on time' according to the industry measure of PPM, but late in passengers' eyes. As punctuality is the main driver of overall passenger satisfaction it follows that greater adherence to a 'right-time' railway could help drive up overall satisfaction.

The next operator should be required to commit to – and demonstrate – a 'right-time' culture and to working with Network Rail to drive sustained improvements in performance. We would like to see within the next franchise:

- A commitment to report the percentage of trains arriving punctually at key intermediate stations.
- A commitment to move towards a 'right-time' railway, including the publication of right-time performance.

4.20.2 Monitoring service quality

The ultimate measure of whether a train company is performing well is whether passengers are happy with the quality of service provided. This is good from a

⁵⁶ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/train-punctuality-the-passenger-perspective>

commercial perspective as well as a customer service one, as evidenced by the conclusions on passenger demand forecasting⁵⁷ which suggest that service quality does have an impact on levels of demand.

The RE's specification for the new franchise must stretch the successful bidder to take West Midlands passenger satisfaction to higher levels. As we can see illustrated in Figure 5, and from the NRPS scores and comparisons in Appendix 2, this should apply both for the franchise as a whole and at a building block level. There is a need to achieve greater consistency of performance across the component parts of the franchise and also to drive satisfaction on all aspects of service delivery upwards, to bring the whole operation up to the achievements of the best comparators.

Targets, measurements, monitoring and transparent reporting are fundamental to delivering improvements to service quality. Transport Focus strongly supports the principle of monitoring and improving service quality through a combination of NRPS results and periodic reviews of train operating company Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

4.20.2.1 National Rail Passenger Survey

We have long advocated more use of quality-focused targets within a franchise. Our strong preference is for targets based on what passengers think, the best judge of quality being those who have used the services in question.

The NRPS is ideally suited to capture information that directly reflects the customer perspective. NRPS has a large sample size, currently covering over 2,300 London Midland passengers in two waves each year, providing for a fair assessment of measures across the identified franchise building blocks. The sampling plan ensures that it is representative of day of travel, journey purpose (commuter, business and leisure), and, of course, by a range of demographic attributes (age, sex, ethnicity etc).

Transport Focus will continue to discuss the application of NRPS targets for the franchise with the Department, WMR and the bidders as required. We may also explore the scope for boosting sample sizes in particular areas, in line with practice in some other Passenger Transport Executive (PTE) areas.

In line with existing DfT policy, bidders for the new franchise should be asked to submit bids that include plans on how they will improve NRPS scores.

We recommend, in line with practice on other recent franchises, bespoke NRPS targets should be established on each of the building blocks to measure passenger satisfaction with station, train and customer service attributes. Doing so simply at a global level risks masking the poorer performing areas.

⁵⁷<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/revisiting-the-elasticity-based-framework-rail-trends-report>

Existing levels of satisfaction should be the starting point for establishing targets which should generally become more stretching as the franchise progresses and also increase to reflect the outcomes delivered by investment (e.g. in capacity improvements). An annual assessment of the combined spring and autumn results would provide a fair measure of the overall passenger satisfaction within each given year.

A financial penalty regime should apply, with resources ring-fenced for additional investment into service quality measures that are most likely to improve passenger satisfaction

4.20.2.2 Key Performance Indicators

The specification should require the operator to conduct KPI assessments across the entire franchise and include all stations and representative samples of the major train service groups. Standards of satisfaction with the customer services function, complaints handling, and the level of appeals to Transport Focus should also be measured. All assessments should be conducted regularly to provide ongoing management information as well as a basis for regular reviews based on collated information.

4.20.2.3 Performance targets

Given the very high significance of these factors to passengers, the specification must include traditional 'hard' performance targets covering punctuality, reliability and crowding. However, we believe that there is a need for much more transparency surrounding these targets.

Transparency will promote greater accountability by making clear to rail passengers, staff, management and other parties how key aspects of the rail service are performing at different places and at different times. The provision of detailed information will enable rail passengers and others hold the train company to account and to ask what is being done to improve services in return for the fares paid. Good management should not feel threatened by this. Indeed the availability of accurate data may actually help them as a particularly bad journey can linger in the memory and distort passengers' perceptions. Accurate, relevant data can help challenge these negative perceptions and is also a vital management tool.

Punctuality data provided only at the overall operator level can easily mask significant differences between routes and times of day. Transport Focus supports the provision of performance data (PPM, 'on time'/'right time' and cancellations) in a fully granular way, allowing data to be aggregated as required. This would allow those who use only the '07:19' and '17:20' to see the performance of those trains – because that is all that matters to them.

Equally, there is currently next to nothing in the public domain about crowding. This is another fundamental aspect of a passenger's journey and an area where greater transparency can generate improvements for passengers.

Further detail about monitoring and reporting punctuality, capacity and timetabling performance is set out in the relevant sections above.

In the medium term we also see value in looking more closely at the choice of performance measurement used. The existing measure (PPM) allows a five or ten minute leeway on late arrival; a train is not late until it exceeds this allowance. However, we know from our research exploring passenger perspectives on train punctuality outlined in section 4.6 that a delay can have an effect on passengers well before that. This might mean addressing the suitability of the current thresholds or even introducing a secondary measure based on right-time arrival. Recent steps by the industry towards publication of right-time data on particular trains make this increasingly feasible and more likely to be the measure on which performance is publicly judged.

Network Rail's performance clearly has a huge bearing on an operator's punctuality and yet a franchise agreement typically creates an obligation only in relation to factors within the train company's direct control. Clearly there are limits to how far one organisation is willing to be held accountable for another's performance but, from a passenger's perspective, it is overall punctuality that matters - not just how well the train company did.

There are obvious benefits in aligning operator and Network Rail incentives and there is much work going on to address this, not least in terms of joint improvement performance plans and potential alliances, as seen in the Wessex 'Deep Alliance' between 2012 and 2015 and the lighter touch framework that is now in place there and elsewhere. We would like to see the franchise specification encourage and cement appropriate joint working approaches. To this end we would ask RE to consider the scope for introducing joint targets for this franchise.

Transport Focus has worked with the Office of Rail and Road and National Rail Enquiries, on behalf of all train operators, to explore passenger views on performance and other data and to understand how this may best be made available to them. This qualitative research⁵⁸ should inform the approach to data publication in the new franchise.

4.20.2.4 Input versus output measures

The balance between input and output measures is a fine one. For instance, the franchise could specify that the bidder purchases 50 new ticket vending machines (an input target) or that it increase passenger satisfaction with retailing (an output target). The latter follows the pattern set in the 2009 South Central franchise with the bidders setting targets for passenger satisfaction and these becoming contractual targets with fines for non-compliance.

⁵⁸ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/presenting-righttime-performance-information-to-rail-passengers>

Transport Focus recognises the value of both input and output measures provided that they are based on passengers' priorities and needs. Some input targets will clearly remain important to passengers e.g. to cover 'hard' targets for things like punctuality, cancellations and crowding; while output targets (based on passenger satisfaction) may be better placed to address some of the 'softer' qualitative elements of a journey. Passenger responses to the consultation should be used to further inform the targets and measures that go into the franchise specification.

We recommend that disaggregated targets for all measures be set and performance against them published widely. A financial penalty regime should apply with resources ring-fenced for additional investment into service quality measures that are most likely to improve passenger satisfaction.

There should be a requirement for the franchise operator to commit to high levels of transparency about all aspects of the franchise, including operational performance and service quality. Bidders should be encouraged to demonstrate how they will take steps to personalise information to make it most relevant to passengers

4.20.3 Fares regulation

Passengers have experienced years of above inflation fare increases. The Government's own Fares and Ticketing Review consultation in 2012⁵⁹ talked of an end to such increases but only once the impact of cost saving measures and improvement in the wider economic situation permits. Transport Focus supports the concept of fares regulation as it provides some degree of protection to passengers, many of whom are captive consumers.

We recommend that the next West Midlands franchise incorporates these recommendations on ticket retailing within the requirements:

- Increases to unregulated fares should be capped at the same level applied to regulated fares.
- The journey opportunities of off-peak passengers should be protected and there should be no further dilution of periods of validity of off-peak tickets.

4.20.4 Passenger compensation

Transport Focus believes that the new franchise should retain Delay Repay style compensation but with the following additional safeguards:

- Not more than 464 journeys are used to calculate annual season ticket holders' fare per journey for Delay Repay purposes, i.e. two trips per day, five

⁵⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/rail-fares-and-ticketing-review>

days a week for 52 weeks, less 5.6 weeks (leave and bank holidays – see <https://www.gov.uk/holiday-entitlement-rights>). Our key concerns are:

- the failure to take into account that most annual season ticket holders take annual leave and do not work on bank holidays
 - the inclusion by some TOCs of weekend use in the calculation (while some annual season ticket holders may travel at the weekend, many will use their ticket only Mondays to Fridays).
- Additional safeguards for commuters who experience regular delays below the current 30-minute threshold. This ‘safety net’ could take several forms:
 - a 1 per cent refund for season ticket holders for every 4-week period in which PPM in either peak falls below a threshold (to be set based on performance on individual routes).
 - Lowering the ‘trigger’ from 30 minutes to 15 in line with that announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Autumn spending review statement.

These safeguards should be established and available at the outset, ready to address any persistent shortcomings in performance that may arise from planned or unplanned disruption on the franchise, such as that which has the potential to arise during the major development planned at Euston station. We have seen elsewhere, most recently at London Bridge, that ongoing service problems have the potential to evoke major discontent and it is important that mechanisms to respond to potential problems are available to provide equitable recompense and demonstrate that the industry will put its money where its mouth is in the event of persistent failure.

In addition, our research⁶⁰ shows that passengers find traditional paper National Rail Travel Vouchers an inconvenience – they cannot be used at TVMs and they cannot be used online where some train companies offer the best prices. Therefore we believe that the default offer should be a refund to the customer’s debit/credit card with options for electronic credit against future ticket purchases online or conventional paper vouchers being available on request.

The so-called enhanced compensation arrangements within some recently-let franchises, which focus on repeated delays above the Delay Repay threshold of 30 minutes, fail to protect passengers experiencing a large number of delays of less than 30 minutes. However, if similar initiatives are included in bidders’ proposals for West Midlands it should be clear on what basis this additional compensation will be provided and what passengers will receive.

⁶⁰ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/train-operator-compensation-schemes-report-of-findings-june-2011>

Our report into passengers' experience of delays and compensation⁶¹ found that 88 per cent of those apparently eligible for compensation for their delay did not make a claim. More needs to be done to increase passengers' awareness of their rights to claim compensation. This right should be promoted through a range of channels, including on trains that are delayed and at stations where delayed services are calling, as well as prominently within the Passenger's Charter, on websites and via Twitter etc. Where trains have a member of staff on board in addition to the driver, claim forms should be distributed at the time wherever practicable. Mechanisms to identify passengers who have been delayed and provide automatic recompense should also be developed and introduced.

We are currently working on a new piece of research to provide updated information about passengers' awareness and experiences of claiming delay compensation. We encourage RE and industry to stay mindful of any emerging findings in the development of proposals in this area.

4.20.5 Complaints handling

In our role as the statutory appeals body⁶² Transport Focus has extensive experience of working with passengers and rail operators to seek resolution of unresolved complaints. We have found a number of recurring issues with either the operators' complaints processes or response quality. We have been working with the industry in an effort to improve customer service, reduce complaint handling times and focus on operators providing quality complaints handling. This should, in turn, decrease the number of passenger appeals to train companies.

It is important that the specification for the franchise requires detailed information about policies and procedures for dealing with complaints. These should demonstrate a clear commitment to best practice and should encompass the points set out in the two sections below.

4.20.5.1 Process issues

- Empower front line staff to deal with complaints on the spot, with processes in place to obtain approval for goodwill there and then.
- Ensure any complaints that can't be resolved by front line staff can be fed into customer relations on the passenger's behalf.
- Make it easy for passengers to get in contact by providing a variety of contact methods and by being pro-active when things go wrong.

⁶¹ <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/understanding-rail-passengers-delays-and-compensation>

⁶² For British rail passengers outside of London

- Empower customer service advisors to apply ‘natural justice’ when dealing with poor passenger experiences and allow redress to go beyond the minimum levels of the Passenger Charter or National Rail Conditions of Carriage.
- Ensure mechanisms to monitor and manage response times and to acknowledge complaints if they cannot be resolved within the target time, which should be published.
- Implement a process whereby appropriate issues are proactively investigated by the customer service advisor, and other relevant staff members, and feed back the findings to the passenger.
- Establish mechanisms to feed complaints into service improvements, where possible, and feed information about this back to the passenger.
- Ensure a clear and well communicated escalation process is in place for complaints handling, including referral to, and cooperation with, Transport Focus or London TravelWatch.

4.20.5.2 Response quality

- Train and empower customer service advisors to identify and address all the points in the complaint and give heavy weighting to ‘addressing all issues raised by the passenger in internal quality monitoring processes. A focus on first time resolution reduces ‘comebacks’ and the need for a subsequent response by the operator.
- Provide clear explanations about why the passenger is/ is not receiving compensation and/or gesture of goodwill.
- Make careful use of appropriately worded standard paragraphs, supplemented as necessary by bespoke responses.
- Ensure customer service advisors use clear, jargon-free English with correct spelling, grammar and punctuation when writing responses.
- Use complaints handling as an opportunity to restore a customer’s faith in the train operator.
- Seek feedback from passengers on the quality of responses and use this to contribute to ongoing quality monitoring and implementing a culture of continuous improvement.

4.20.5.3 Legacy complaints

A clear process for handling legacy complaints should be established. Transport Focus recommends that all complaints should be dealt with by the new operators from the first day onwards, with appropriate recompense mechanisms from the outgoing operator established to enable this. This should extend to honouring any complimentary journeys or vouchers which remain within their expiry date after the new franchise operation starts.

Making the incumbent responsible for handling complaints reduces confusion and complexity for the passenger. It also ensures that complaints are handled by the operator with an ongoing interest in retaining the passenger, and who is best placed to resolve any issues and implement any changes as a result of the complaint.

4.20.6 Lost property

Every year passengers lose a huge number of items on the rail network. Many of those passengers never manage to locate the items, even if they have been handed in. From our preliminary investigation into this subject we have concluded that some operators systems are not efficient or consistently effective in managing lost property. It is therefore important that operators develop systems that will:

- Register and track an item of lost property from the point it comes into their possession and allow it to be open to enquiry within 24 hours.
- Provide secure storage from the point an item is handed in at the station until its arrival at the location where it will be held.
- Register the item with an accurate description including any distinguishing marks, brands or serial numbers.
- Make it simple for the passenger to try and locate items. A minimum of a phone number and an online service should be provided, and a reasonable response time advertised and adhered to.
- Include rechecking of the register on a regular basis and inform the passenger promptly by their preferred method of contact if their item is located.

Transport Focus also recommends that operators:

- ensure any charges to reunite the passenger with their item are capped at a reasonable level
- actively seek to increase the number of items repatriated to their owner
- define a process for dealing with 'live incidents' in which a passenger reports that they have left an item on a train that is about to depart
- demonstrate how the system can facilitate work with British Transport Police to identify any items held by the operator that have been reported as stolen
- demonstrate how the system will be monitored and measured within their business to ensure it is effective in meeting the above objectives
- actively work towards the establishment of a national lost property system, and if established should participate in the scheme.

5. Further information

For further information about this response to the West Midlands franchise consultation please contact:

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Further details of all our publications exploring passenger perspectives on a range of issues can be found on the Transport Focus website (www.transportfocus.org.uk).

For specific information about franchising please see:

<http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/franchising>

6. Appendices

Appendix 1 NRPS building block definitions

London Midland: London commuter

Journeys on London Euston – Northampton services

London Midland: West Coast

Journeys on London Euston – Liverpool Lime Street services

London Midland: West Midlands

Journeys on several rail lines in and around Birmingham New Street

Appendix 2 NRPS satisfaction scores⁶³

A2.1 NRPS autumn 2015: percentage satisfied, London Midland compared to London and South East sector

Factor	TOC	Sector	TOC index ⁶⁴
Overall satisfaction with your journey	86	82	105%
Station factors			
Overall satisfaction with the station	80	79	101%
Ticket buying facilities	76	73	103%
Provision of information about train times/platforms	86	81	107%
The upkeep/repair of the station buildings/platforms	71	71	101%
Cleanliness	76	76	99%
The facilities and services	58	54	107%
The attitudes and helpfulness of the staff	77	74	105%
Connections with other forms of public transport	68	76	90%
Facilities for car parking	58	47	122%
Overall environment	71	70	102%
Your personal security whilst using the station	73	72	102%
The availability of staff	61	63	97%
The provision of shelter facilities	70	68	103%
Availability of seating	52	45	116%
How request to station staff was handled	91	85	107%
The choice of shops/eating/drinking facilities available	48	48	100%
Train factors			
Overall satisfaction with the train	83	80	104%
The frequency of the trains on that route	80	75	106%
Punctuality/reliability	76	75	101%
The length of time the journey was scheduled to take	85	82	104%
Connections with other train services	77	75	102%
The value for money of the price of your ticket	57	43	131%
Cleanliness of the train	75	76	100%
Upkeep and repair of the train	76	75	101%
The provision of information during the journey	73	71	104%
The helpfulness and attitude of staff on train	63	56	111%
The space for luggage	54	50	109%
The toilet facilities	42	33	128%
Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	68	62	110%
The comfort of the seating area	75	70	106%
The ease of being able to get on and off	80	77	104%
Your personal security on board	80	77	105%
The cleanliness of the inside	74	76	98%
The cleanliness of the outside	78	76	103%
The availability of staff	41	35	119%
How well train company deals with delays	41	35	116%
TOC score is 5% or more lower than sector average			
TOC score is 5% or more higher than sector average			

⁶³ In Appendix 2 * indicates building block scores where the sample size is below 100

⁶⁴ TOC Index shows performance of TOC against the sector as a percentage (e.g. if TOC score is equal to sector score the TOC Index would be 100%. If it is 102% the performance is better)

A2.2 NRPS autumn 2015: percentage satisfied, West Coast compared to Interurban typology average and best in class

	West Coast	Interurban average	Interurban best in class
Overall satisfaction with your journey	86	84	92
Station factors			
Overall satisfaction with the station	78	84	89
Ticket buying facilities	81	80	98
Provision of information about train times/platforms	87	87	90
The upkeep/repair of the station buildings/platforms	68	77	91
Cleanliness	77	79	90
The facilities and services	63	64	76
The attitudes and helpfulness of the staff	87	79	89
Connections with other forms of public transport	76	79	91
Facilities for car parking	*	59	73
Overall environment	72	76	87
Your personal security whilst using	73	79	88
The availability of staff	77	68	85
The provision of shelter facilities	75	75	83
Availability of seating	61	47	69
How request to station staff was handled	*	90	100
The choice of shops/eating/drinking facilities available	41	56	66
Train factors			
Overall satisfaction with the train	84	82	91
The frequency of the trains on that route	75	82	93
Punctuality/reliability	78	81	93
The length of time the journey was scheduled to take	81	81	90
Connections with other train services	80	76	91
The value for money for the price of your ticket	65	52	67
Cleanliness of the train	74	76	87
Upkeep and repair of the train	76	74	87
The provision of information during the journey	73	75	83
The helpfulness and attitude of staff on train	68	79	86
The space for luggage	60	55	69
The toilet facilities	50	42	59
Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	73	65	83
The comfort of the seating area	79	71	86
The ease of being able to get on and off	82	82	88
Your personal security whilst on board	82	84	88
The cleanliness of the inside	75	77	88
The cleanliness of the outside	83	76	84
The availability of staff	50	62	76
How well train company dealt with delays	*	56	82
Building block score is 5% or more lower than typology average			
Building block score is 5% or more higher than typology average			

A2.3 NRPS autumn 2015: percentage satisfied, London Commuter compared to Long Commute typology average and best in class

	London Commuter	Long Commute average	Long Commute best in class
Overall satisfaction with your journey	82	81	91
Station factors			
Overall satisfaction with the station	79	79	92
Ticket buying facilities	69	74	84
Provision of information about train times/platforms	85	81	89
The upkeep/repair of the station buildings/platforms	70	70	95
Cleanliness	69	76	92
The facilities and services	57	58	79
The attitudes and helpfulness of the staff	67	75	86
Connections with other forms of public transport	68	75	82
Facilities for car parking	58	54	75
Overall environment	65	69	89
Your personal security whilst using	71	73	86
The availability of staff	47	64	79
The provision of shelter facilities	62	69	84
Availability of seating	35	44	60
How request to station staff was handled	*	83	100
The choice of shops/eating/drinking facilities available	49	49	62
Train factors			
Overall satisfaction with the train	82	80	92
The frequency of the trains on that route	81	76	89
Punctuality/reliability	76	75	91
The length of time the journey was scheduled to take	85	82	94
Connections with other train services	72	75	85
The value for money for the price of your ticket	39	41	59
Cleanliness of the train	74	74	90
Upkeep and repair of the train	78	74	89
The provision of information during the journey	75	68	80
The helpfulness and attitude of staff on train	63	60	84
The space for luggage	50	48	65
The toilet facilities	42	38	54
Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	65	62	77
The comfort of the seating area	70	68	81
The ease of being able to get on and off	81	78	89
Your personal security whilst on board	82	78	88
The cleanliness of the inside	73	74	90
The cleanliness of the outside	75	74	86
The availability of staff	38	38	64
How well train company dealt with delays	30	35	72
Building block score is 5% or more lower than typology average			
Building block score is 5% or more higher than typology average			

A2.4 NRPS autumn 2015: percentage satisfied, West Midlands compared to Short Commute typology average and best in class

	West Midlands	Short Commute average	Short Commute best in class
Overall satisfaction with your journey	87	83	95
Station factors			
Overall satisfaction with the station	81	80	91
Ticket buying facilities	77	75	95
Provision of information about train times/platforms	87	81	93
The upkeep/repair of the station buildings/platforms	73	74	88
Cleanliness	78	78	91
The facilities and services	57	51	67
The attitudes and helpfulness of the staff	79	74	93
Connections with other forms of public transport	66	76	83
Facilities for car parking	55	42	82
Overall environment	73	72	86
Your personal security whilst using	74	71	81
The availability of staff	62	65	87
The provision of shelter facilities	72	69	86
Availability of seating	56	49	73
How request to station staff was handled	*	87	96
The choice of shops/eating/drinking facilities available	49	45	62
Train factors			
Overall satisfaction with the train	84	81	95
The frequency of the trains on that route	80	75	96
Punctuality/reliability	76	77	95
The length of time the journey was scheduled to take	86	83	96
Connections with other train services	77	77	87
The value for money for the price of your ticket	62	48	72
Cleanliness of the train	76	76	91
Upkeep and repair of the train	75	76	94
The provision of information during the journey	73	73	91
The helpfulness and attitude of staff on train	61	56	96
The space for luggage	55	53	73
The toilet facilities	40	29	65
Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	68	64	83
The comfort of the seating area	75	73	86
The ease of being able to get on and off	80	77	92
Your personal security whilst on board	80	75	87
The cleanliness of the inside	75	77	92
The cleanliness of the outside	78	77	95
The availability of staff	41	36	83
How well train company dealt with delays	45	34	66
Building block score is 5% or more lower than typology average			
Building block score is 5% or more higher than typology average			

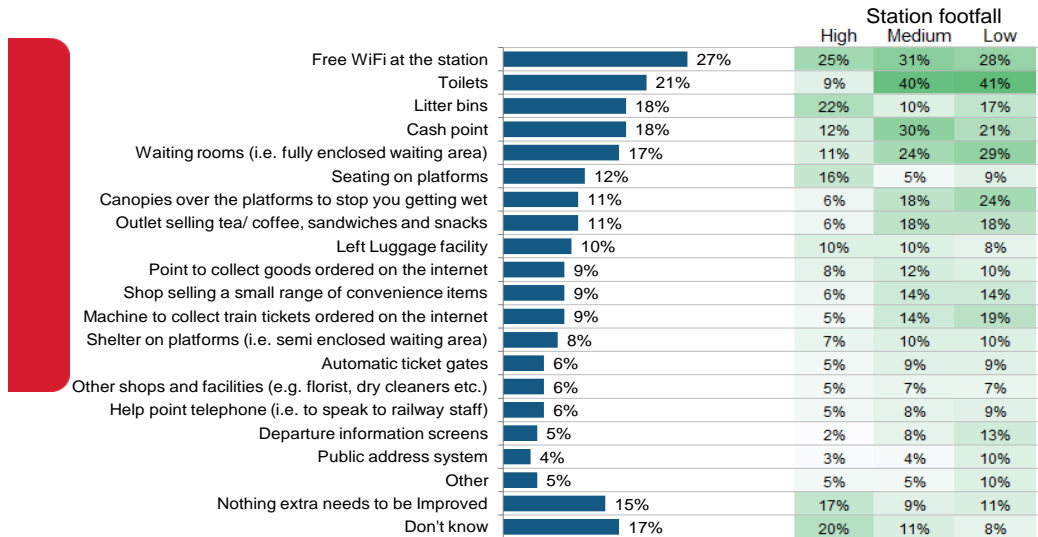
Appendix 3 Passenger priorities for station requirements and improvements

A3.1 Facilities need providing

A3.1.1 According to station footfall – GB stations

Free Wi-Fi at stations consistently required by station type

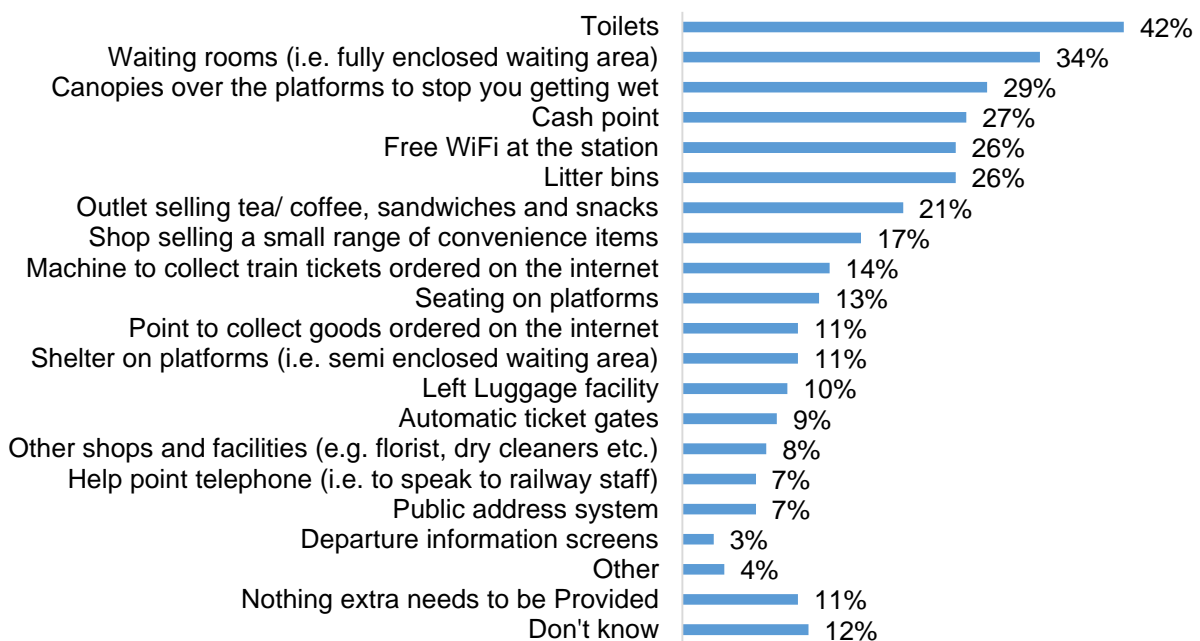
Station improvements [prompted] – needs providing: All GB rail passengers



Q.26b Still thinking only about the station where you were handed this questionnaire, which of the following station facilities need to be improved or need to be provided at this station? providing; Base: All GB Rail Passengers n=3,559



A3.1.2 London Midland passengers - all stations – needs providing

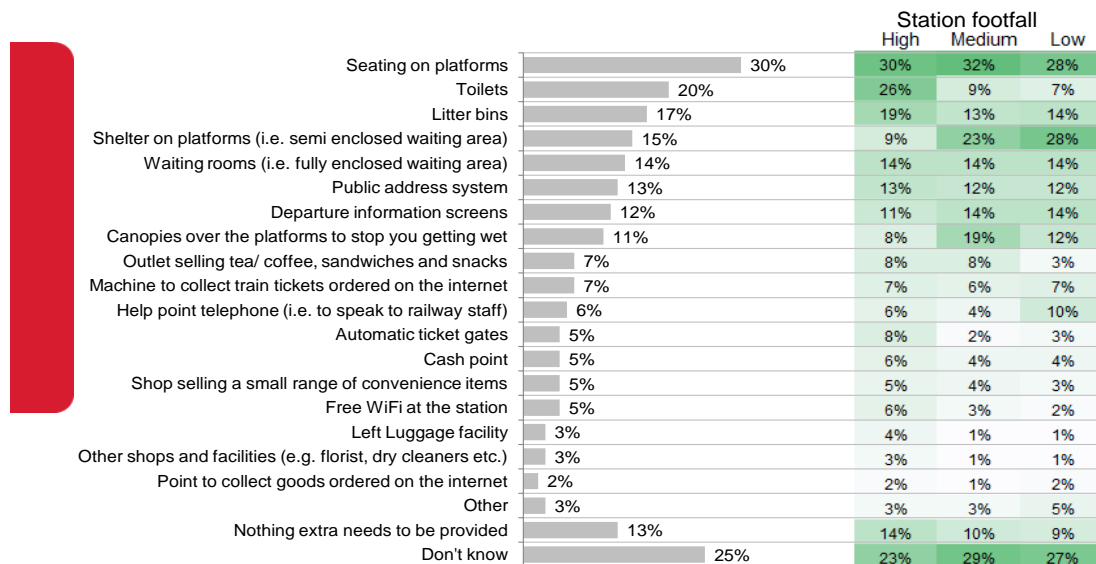


A3.2 Facilities need improving

A3.2.1 According to station footfall – GB stations

Improvements to seating consistently important. Improving toilets important at high footfall stations, and shelter important at lower footfall

Station improvements [prompted] – needs improving: All GB rail passengers

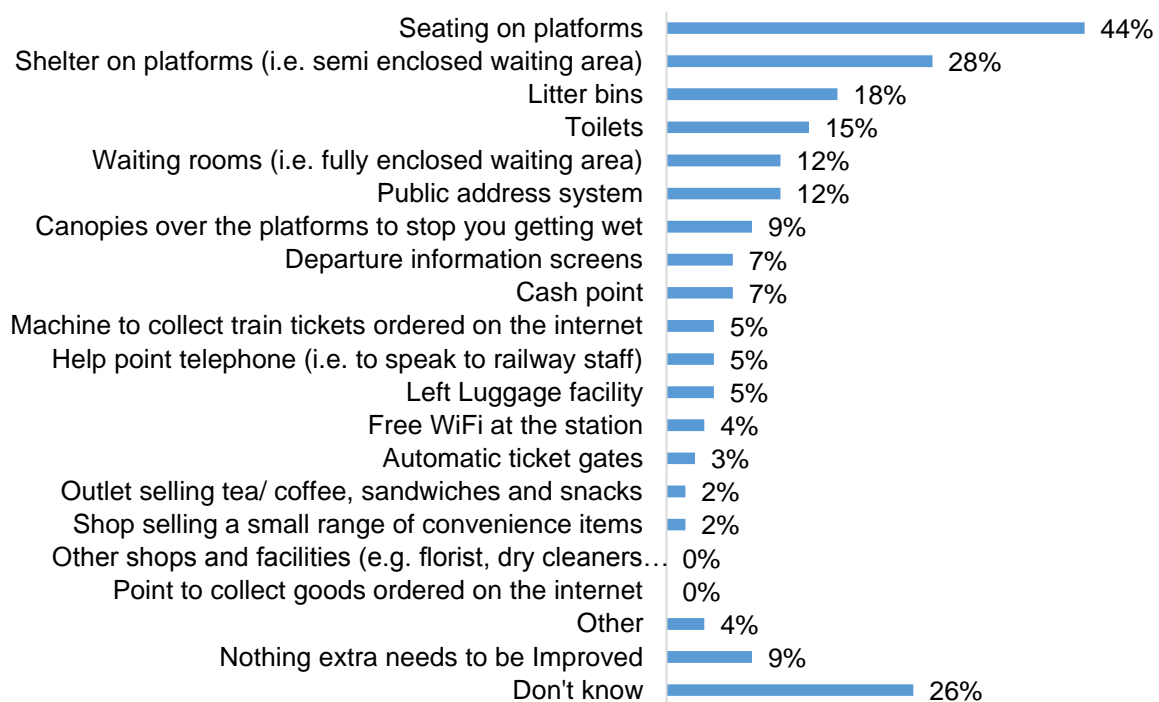


30 

Q.26b Still thinking only about the station where you were handed this questionnaire, which of the following station facilities need to be improved or need to be provided at this station? Improving. Base: All GB Rail Passengers n=3,559

Passengerfocus 
putting passengers first

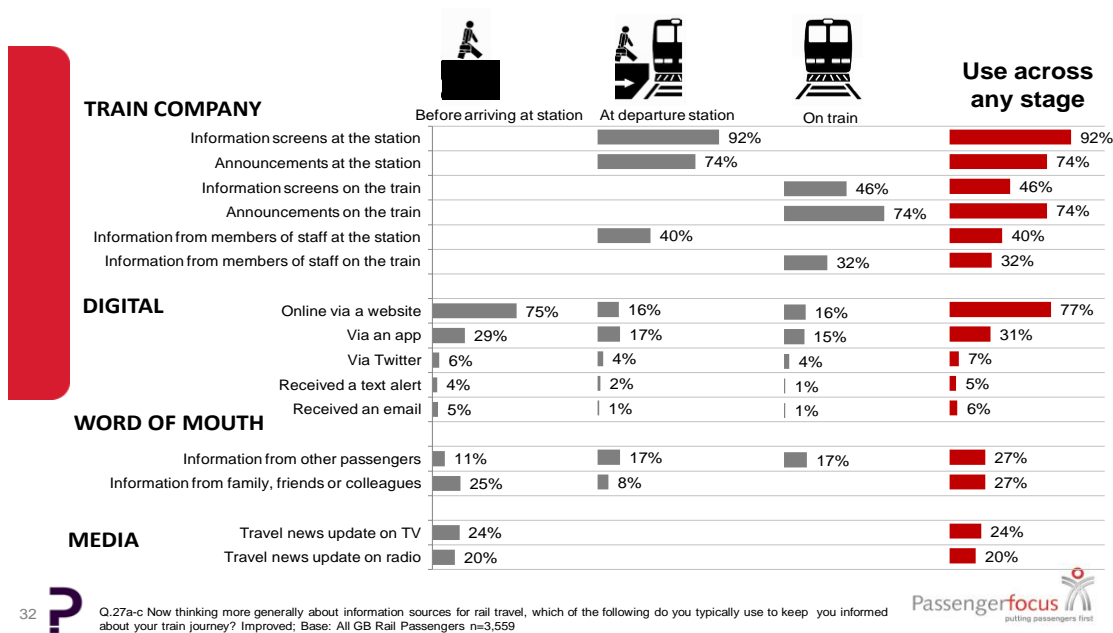
A3.2.2 London Midland passengers – all stations – needs improving



Appendix 4 Information used at different stages of the journey

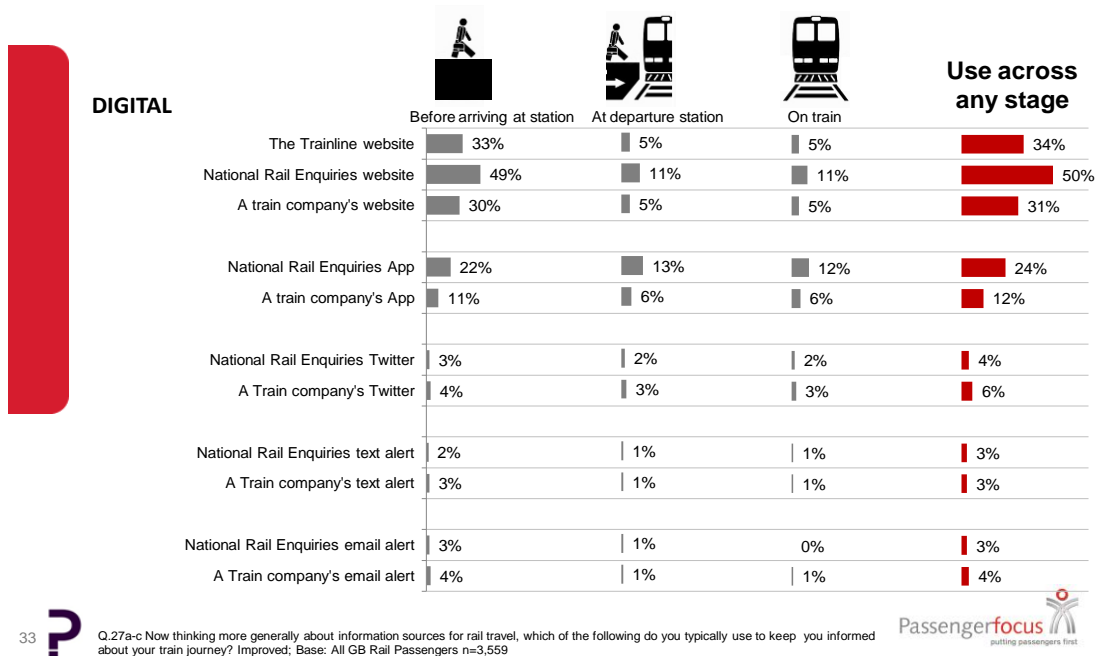
6A - Information used at different stages of the journey

Stages of journey where information used: All GB rail passengers



6B - NRE website and app - key sources of digital information

Stages of journey where digital information used: All GB rail passengers



Appendix 5 Potential diversionary routes for the West Midlands network

The following routes, based on the full current franchise area, appear to be practical and suitable alternatives for diversion when engineering work is taking place. These, and any other viable alternatives that can be identified, should be subject to the “not at the same time as” rule.

Listed from north to south:

1. Liverpool Lime Street via Warrington Bank Quay if via Runcorn is not available (NA) – now an all-electric route.
2. One of Stafford to Crewe via Madeley and via Stoke must be available at all times (AAT).
 - 3.1 If Wolverhampton to Stafford via Penkridge is NA then route via Cannock (will be all-electric when the Rugeley line is complete).
 - 3.2 If Stafford itself is blocked then via Cannock and Colwich Junction direct to Stone Junction – for Birmingham to Liverpool Lime Street services, and also for Euston to Crewe services.
4. If Birmingham to Wolverhampton via Smethwick (used by Shrewsbury and Liverpool services) is NA then all possible alternative combinations via Tame Bridge, including direct from Portobello Junction to Bushbury Junction (i.e., not via Wolverhampton) Also applies for services diverted via Cannock under 3.
5. One route to Droitwich, and thence to Worcester/Hereford, to be AAT (i.e., Snow Hill via Stourbridge Junction and New Street via Bromsgrove).
6. One of Worcester Foregate Street/Shrub Hill to be AAT.
7. One of New Street to Kings Norton via University (City Line) and via the Camp Hill Line to be AAT, N.B., only possible for diesel services as Camp Hill isn't electrified.
8. One route from Tyseley to Stratford-upon-Avon to be AAT (i.e, via Dorridge or Earlswood).
9. If via Northampton is NA then can divert via Weedon, or vice versa.
10. Limited rights to divert to Kensington Olympia via West London Junction (i.e, Willesden, either via the fast lines or via the dive under from the slow lines) if Euston is NA.