



## Light at the end of the tunnel?

The impact of Chiltern Railways' handling of the contingency arrangements following the tunnel collapse at Gerrards Cross on 30 June 2005

A report by Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch



## Foreword

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Coping with the unexpected is a challenge for any organisation. However, effective contingency planning can minimise and ameliorate disruption both to companies and their customers.

Chiltern Railways faced a serious challenge on the night of 30 June 2005 when they found that their main route into London was blocked by the collapse of tunnel works at Gerrards Cross. In the following weeks they also had to respond both to the tragic events of 7 July and a serious lineside fire on 14 July.

This report seeks to identify from the passenger perspective both the things that went wrong and those that went right in the way in which Chiltern dealt with the situation. Commendably Chiltern staff were praised by passengers for their politeness, availability and the level of information they were able to give passengers. Passengers were also pleased by Chiltern's ability to restore some services within hours of the incident, and by the co-operation of other train operating companies, Network Rail and London Underground. However the report also makes recommendations as to how Chiltern's contingency planning could be improved, notably the role of the Passenger Information Manager and arrangements for rail replacement bus services.

As such this report also has wider application than that of Chiltern Railways and so we commend it to the wider transport industry.

Brian Cooke  
Chairman, London TravelWatch

Colin Foxall  
Chairman, Passenger Focus

## Executive Summary

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The tunnel works at Gerrards Cross, necessary to facilitate the building of a Tesco store in the airspace over the line, collapsed on 30 June 2005. From that date until 19 August 2005, Chiltern Railways implemented contingency arrangements. Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch commissioned a passenger survey to test and examine passenger perceptions of the handling of the disruption by Chiltern Railways, and to make recommendations as to how Chiltern and other train companies can improve their contingency planning.

- The three areas that recorded the highest levels of satisfaction were generated by Chiltern staff: their politeness, availability, and level of information given by them
- The three areas that recorded the lowest levels of satisfaction were the journey times in the replacement timetable, the frequency of trains in the replacement timetable and the levels of information available from radio and television
- Overall, 48.8% of the respondents expressed themselves as very or fairly satisfied (308 passengers), 19.2% (121 passengers) were neither satisfied or dissatisfied, 16.8% were fairly or very dissatisfied and only two had no opinion – but 14.9% did not answer
- More people were dissatisfied than satisfied with the compensation scheme, with the frequency of trains in the replacement timetable and their journey times, and the availability and quality of alternative car parking.

As a result, recommendations made by Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch have been accepted by Chiltern who recognised there was a need for more robust procedures and working practices to ensure that information on incidents is made available in a timely way (whilst noting that some implementation is subject to further consultation between the Chiltern Board and the Department for Transport as they will involve changes to franchise commitments).

- The next Chiltern business plan is likely to include provision for changes to close the information gap, which might include the replacement of pagers with PDA palm tops, and renewal of the customer information systems (subject to Department for Transport approval)
- Chiltern agreed to review the duties of the Passenger Information Manager from an incident management perspective
- Emergency timetable iterations should be limited to provide passengers with stability in knowing what services were operating
- Chiltern agreed to review use of information at bus stops at each station which would be used at time of emergency or engineering works.

## **Introduction**

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Between 19 and 22 September 2005, over 2,500 survey forms were handed out at stations and on trains and over 630 were returned, giving a significant return rate of 25%. This ensured the data taken forward into discussions with Chiltern was robust.

### **Appendix 1**

This shows the results of the survey as they were presented to the Chiltern Railways Passenger Board on 27 January 2006. Individual comments have been added to the text where they add context.

The Chiltern Passenger Board comprises representatives from Rail User Groups along the line of route, together with London TravelWatch, Passenger Focus and Transport for London (TfL) who meet regularly with senior Chiltern management to discuss areas and issues of concern.

Members of the Passenger Board noted the findings and agreed that further discussions should take place between Chiltern Railways management and representatives from Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch following further investigation of the data.

### **Appendix 2**

This is the formal Chiltern Railways response to the report in March 2006. Subsequently Chiltern agreed to meet again with Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch once further internal discussions had identified a way forward.

### **Appendix 3**

In May 2006 Chiltern were able to report back to London TravelWatch and Passenger Focus on the recommendations that they accepted and those that required Department for Transport approval.

# Appendix One

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## Chiltern Railways Passenger Board, at The Swan theatre, High Wycombe 27 January 2006

An interim report for the Chiltern Passenger Board detailing the results of the survey work into passenger perceptions of Chiltern Railways' handling of the contingency arrangements following the tunnel collapse at Gerrards Cross.

### 1. Executive summary

- A total of 631 completed response forms received to date – a 25% return rate
- Almost one third of passengers were not aware of the tunnel collapse until they first arrived at the station despite extensive publicity
- Nearly half of passengers found out their alternative travel arrangements at stations rather than through media or other methods of communication
- Only one quarter of all the journeys made by respondents during this period involved traveling solely on a Chiltern train
- The three areas that recorded the highest levels of satisfaction were generated by Chiltern staff: their politeness, availability, and level of information given by them
- The three areas that recorded the lowest levels of satisfaction were the journey times in the replacement timetable, the frequency of trains in the replacement timetable and the levels of information available from radio and television
- Areas which recorded the highest percentage of passengers who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied were the quality of information on radio and TV, the availability of information to plan alternative journeys, and the availability of staff
- Overall, 48.8% of the respondents expressed themselves as very or fairly satisfied (308 passengers), 19.2% (121 passengers) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 16.8% were fairly or very dissatisfied and only two had no opinion – but 14.9% did not answer
- Four fifths of passengers felt their frequency of travel would not change but more than one in ten commented that they would make fewer or far fewer journeys.
- More people were dissatisfied than satisfied with the compensation scheme, with the frequency of trains in the replacement timetable and their journey times, and the availability and quality of alternative car parking.
- Despite the increased use of the internet, most passengers still found out about the end of the disruption by reading station notices.

### 2. Background

The tunnel works at Gerrards Cross, necessary to facilitate the building of a Tesco store in the airspace over the line, collapsed on 30 June 2005. From that date until 19 August 2006, Chiltern Railways implemented contingency arrangements. The Rail Passengers Council (RPC) and London Transport Users Committee (LTUC) commissioned a passenger survey to test and examine passenger perceptions of the handling of the disruption by Chiltern Railways.

### 3. The survey process

A copy of the questionnaire is attached at Appendix 1. Staff and members from the RPC and LTUC

handed out 2,500 questionnaires at Gerrards Cross station on Monday 19 September, at Beaconsfield station on Tuesday 20 September, and on a mix of trains between Tuesday and Thursday 22 September. To date a total of 631 completed surveys have been returned giving a response rate of just over 25%.

#### 4. The questions

##### **Q1 How did you originally find out about the disruption to your service?**

Although passengers were asked to identify the original source of their information, 93 ticked more than one option, and 38 did not respond. There were a combined 711 entries from those that did respond.

The results were:

Source	No.	%
Television	224	32
Arrived at station and read notice	116	16
Arrived at station and spoke to staff	112	16
Friends/Family	131	18
Radio	79	11
Internet	40	6

*"It was on the train home."*

*"I passed a man on the road who told me."*

##### **Q2 How did you find out about alternative travel options available to you during the period of disruption?**

Although passengers were asked to identify the original source of their information, 214 ticked more than one option, and 40 did not respond. There were 894 responses altogether.

Source	No.	%
Station staff	237	27
Station notices	200	22
Internet	174	19
Friends & Family	80	9
Radio	19	2
Television	31	3

Passengers were given two further options:

Decision	No.	%
Decided to travel by other means of transport that I was already familiar with	107	12
Decided to no longer make the journey	46	5

**Q2a If you have any suggestions about how alternative travel options could have been better communicated please write them here:**

*"Internet web site e.g. www notice-boards @ stations"*

*"National rail enquiries helpline - couldn't get through for ages & when did they didn't know very much to begin with."*

*"Once set up do not change them without telling people in advance. The standard replacement service was frequently supplemented with additional services - but these were sometimes not run."*

**Q3 Thinking about the Chiltern Railways journeys you needed to make during the period of disruption, how did you actually make them?**

Passengers were invited to tick all that applied; 344 ticked more than one option, and 19 did not respond. There were 1,240 responses altogether.

Method of travel	No.	%
By Chiltern Railways train	336	27
By Car	189	15
By London Underground	147	12
By rail replacement bus	145	12
By GW	62	5
By Virgin Trains	95	8
By taxi	41	3
Walked	21	2
By coach	62	5
By bicycle	16	1
By another TOC	53	4
Decided not to make journey	73	6

**Q3a How much extra time did the disruption add to each leg of your journey?**

Not all passengers responded to this question.

Extra time	No.	%
no extra time	30	4
Less than 15 minutes	15	2
Between 15 and 30 minutes	70	11
Between 30 and 45 minutes	170	30
Between 45 and 60 minutes	75	12
Between 60 and 75 minutes	165	26
More than 75 minutes	65	10

**Q4 Thinking about all of the journeys you made with Chiltern during this period please rate your satisfaction with the following (all categories were rated as; very satisfied, fairly satisfied, neither satisfied or dissatisfied, fairly dissatisfied, very dissatisfied, or no opinion).**

*Information initially provided by Chiltern Railways website to alert you to the disruption.*

- 250 passengers (40%) expressed themselves as very or fairly satisfied
- 80 (13%) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- 89 (14%) were fairly or very dissatisfied
- 151 (24%) had no opinion
- 61 people did not respond (10%)

*Printed information directly available from Chiltern Railways*

- 263 passengers (42%) expressed themselves as very or fairly satisfied
- 106 (17%) were impartial
- 106 (17%) were fairly or very dissatisfied
- 87 (14%) had no opinion
- 67 people did not respond (11%)

*Availability of information to plan alternative journeys*

- 245 passengers (39%) expressed themselves as very or fairly satisfied
- 125 (20%) were impartial
- 155 (25%) were fairly or very dissatisfied
- 43 (7%) had no opinion
- 63 people did not respond (10%)

*Information available from radio and newspapers*

- 124 passengers (20%) expressed themselves as very or fairly satisfied
- 158 (25%) were impartial
- 157 (25%) were fairly or very dissatisfied
- 131 (21%) had no opinion
- 60 people did not respond (10%)

*Frequency of trains in replacement timetable*

- 191 passengers (30%) expressed themselves as very or fairly satisfied
- 99 (16%) were impartial
- 216 (34%) were fairly or very dissatisfied
- 63 (10%) had no opinion
- 62 people did not respond (10%)

*Journey times in replacement timetable*

- 171 passengers (27%) expressed themselves as very or fairly satisfied
- 81 (13%) were impartial
- 246 (39%) were fairly or very dissatisfied
- 68 (11%) had no opinion
- 64 people did not respond (10%)

*Availability of alternative car parking*

- 91 passengers (14%) expressed themselves as very or fairly satisfied
- 73 (12%) were impartial
- 112 (18%) were fairly or very dissatisfied



- 270 (43%) had no opinion
- 83 people did not respond (13%)

#### *Quality of alternative car parking*

- 76 passengers (12%) expressed themselves as very or fairly satisfied
- 93 (15%) were impartial
- 91 (15%) were fairly or very dissatisfied
- 283 (45%) had no opinion
- 87 people did not respond (14%)

#### *Frequency of replacement buses*

- 145 passengers (23%) expressed themselves as very or fairly satisfied
- 67 (11%) were impartial
- 129 (21%) were fairly or very dissatisfied
- 212 (34%) had no opinion
- 76 people did not respond (12%)

#### *Timing of replacement buses to tie in with trains*

- 159 passengers (25%) expressed themselves as very or fairly satisfied
- 75 (12%) were impartial
- 105 (17%) were fairly or very dissatisfied
- 218 (35%) had no opinion
- 72 people did not respond (11%)

#### *Comfort of replacement buses*

- 159 passengers (25%) expressed themselves as very or fairly satisfied
- 94 (15%) were impartial
- 78 (12%) were fairly or very dissatisfied
- 223 (35%) had no opinion
- 74 people did not respond (12%)

#### *Availability of Chiltern staff*

- 329 passengers (52%) expressed themselves as very or fairly satisfied
- 108 (17%) were impartial
- 61 (10%) were fairly or very dissatisfied.
- 65 (10%) had no opinion
- 67 people did not respond (11%)

#### *Politeness of Chiltern staff*

- 397 passengers (63%) expressed themselves as very or fairly satisfied
- 66 (11%) were impartial
- 41 (7%) were fairly or very dissatisfied
- 62 (10%) had no opinion
- 64 people did not respond (10%)

*Quality of information provided by Chiltern staff*

- 332 passengers (53%) expressed themselves as very or fairly satisfied
- 100 (16%) were impartial
- 79 (13%) were fairly or very dissatisfied
- 58 (9%) had no opinion
- 62 people did not respond (9%)

*Quality of information provided by other TOC staff*

- 111 (18%) passengers expressed themselves as very or fairly satisfied
- 105 (17%) were impartial
- 65 (10%) were fairly or very dissatisfied
- 269 (43%) had no opinion
- 80 people did not respond (13%)

*Levels of compensation/discount on ticket price*

- 152 passengers (24%) expressed themselves as very or fairly satisfied
- 65 (10%) were impartial
- 164 (26%) were fairly or very dissatisfied
- 169 (27%) had no opinion
- 79 people did not respond (13%)

*Overall handling of the disruption by Chiltern*

- 308 passengers (49%) expressed themselves as very or fairly satisfied
- 121 (19%) were impartial
- 106 (17%) were fairly or very dissatisfied
- Two passengers had no opinion
- 94 people did not respond (15%)

**Q4a Do you have any suggestions as to how these areas could have been improved?**

*“A dedicated website”*

*“Chiltern website kept crashing! Useless for obtaining info at beginning of disruption.”*

*“When there is disruption could a qualified member of rail staff be available at a desk for queries only regarding alternative routes and not for ticket purchases. This enables those purchasing tickets on routes still running to go ahead and not get held up”*

*“The internet was not a reliable source of information. The compensation procedures should have been published on day one - this affected my journey and cost me £50! The number of trains from Denham should have been doubled- there are two lines of traffic!!”*

*“I drove to West Ruislip to catch the early train there. Chiltern staff were very helpful - there was however no alternative to driving. A bus should have been put on from there to spread the load - Denham was too crowded where you arrived very early”*

**Q5 Which part of the Chiltern Railways network do you tend to travel on?**

Section of the network	No.	%
to/from Marylebone via Wycombe	542	85.9
"internal" on Joint Line	53	8.4
any via Amersham	4	0.6
unclear	7	1.1
none specified	25	4
total	631	
High Wycombe	109	20.1
Gerrards Cross	97	17.9
Beaconsfield	87	16
Banbury	43	7.9
Haddenham	30	5.5
Leamington Spa	22	4
Bicester North	21	3.9
Dorridge	18	3.3
Princes Risborough	18	3.3
Warwick Parkway	18	3.3
Birmingham	14	2.6
Seer Green	13	2.4
Denham	10	1.9
Solihull	10	1.9
Wembley Stadium	5	0.9
Northolt Park	4	0.7
South Ruislip	4	0.7
Warwick	4	0.7
Kings Sutton	3	0.6
Stratford-upon-Avon	3	0.6
Kidderminster	2	0.4
Monks Risborough	2	0.4
Denham Golf Club	1	0.2
Lea Green	1	0.2
Saunderton	1	0.2
Stourbridge Junction	1	0.2
Subury Hill Harrow	1	0.2
total	542	

**Q6 For which of the following journey purposes do you use Chiltern Trains (Please tick all that apply):**

329 ticked more than one option, and 15 did not respond. There were 1,399 responses altogether.

Daily commuting for work	218	Less regular commuting for work	175
Daily commuting for education	37	Less regular commuting for education	30
On company business	153	On personal business	80
Visiting friends/relatives	154	Shopping	158
Travel to/from holiday	64	A day out	187
Sport	37	Other leisure	106

**Q7 How did you find out that disruption to your Chiltern services had ended and returned to normal?**

Although passengers were asked to identify the original source of their information, 159 ticked more than one option, and 43 did not respond. There were 788 responses altogether.

Medium	No.	%
Arrived at station and read notice	176	22
Friends/Family	160	20
Internet	130	17
Arrived at station and spoke to staff	87	11
Television	141	18
Radio	68	9
other	16	2

*“Read Chiltern leaflet“*

*“Local paper - Bucks Examiner”*

**Q8 Thinking about your experiences during the disruption caused by the tunnel collapse at Gerrards Cross, how has this affected the number of journeys you are likely to make with Chiltern railways in the future?**

- 498 passengers (79%) stated that it makes no difference to the likely number of journeys
- 68 passengers (11%) considered they were likely to make fewer journeys as a result
- 26 did not respond (4%)
- 18 passengers (3%) considered that they were likely to make far fewer journeys as a result
- 11 passengers (2%) stated that they were likely to make far more journeys with Chiltern as a result
- 10 passengers (2%) stated that they were likely to make more journeys with Chiltern as a result

**Q9 Additional comments**

*“You are under the impression that all travellers have a website and would be able to rearrange their journey before leaving home. National rail enquiries cannot always be of immediate assistance nor can Chiltern railways enquiries. Can a website be available and in working order for comments at the station to make their own enquiries? For emergency use only? Or under the guidance of qualified member of staff whose main duties is alternative travel routes.”*

*“I am concerned that Chiltern railways will try to recover lost revenues by putting up ticket prices by even more than they would have done anyway”*

*“The problem highlights a greater need for company planning and awareness of managing stakeholders (customers) and initial communication links with them”*

*A difficult situation reasonably well handled. Good info leaflet produced at the 'end' but more 'at station' updated whilst in progress would have helped other than the generic 'we're doing what we can' faster.*

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Appendix 1

### Passenger Opinion Survey

#### Chiltern Railways Passengers Affected by the Recent Disruption Caused by the Collapse of the Tunnel at Gerrards Cross

This survey is being carried out to gain passengers' opinions on how well the recent disruption to Chiltern Railways services was handled, and identify if improvements can be made in the event of any future incidents, either locally or in other parts of the U.K.

**Please complete this questionnaire only if you travelled by, or attempted to travel by, Chiltern Railways trains during the recent disruption caused by the collapse of the tunnel at Gerrards Cross between 30 June and 19 August 2005.**

This survey is a joint initiative between the Chiltern Railways Passenger Board, the London Transport Users Committee and the Rail Passengers Council.

Your help is much appreciated; the questions are straightforward and should only take a few minutes to answer. To return this questionnaire please follow the instructions of the person who gave it to you (for example place it in the designated box or leave it on the train). Alternatively please return it to:

**Rail Passengers Council,  
FREEPOST WA1521,  
Warrington,  
WA4 6GP.**

<i>date</i>		<i>train</i>		<i>input</i>	
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- TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS PLEASE TICK THE BOX NEXT TO THE ANSWER(S) THAT APPLY OR WRITE YOUR ANSWER IN THE SPACE PROVIDED.

**SECTION 1: THE INITIAL DISRUPTION**

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Q1 How did you originally find out about the disruption to your Chiltern service?  
PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- |                                    |                                       |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Arrived at station and read notice | Arrived at station and spoke to staff |
| TV                                 | Radio                                 |
| Internet                           | Friends/family                        |

Other – Please specify

.....

Q2 How did you find out about alternative travel options available to you during the period of disruption? PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| Station notices                               | Station staff                            |
| TV  | Radio                                    |
| Internet                                      | Friends/family                           |
| Decided to travel by other means of transport | Decided to no longer make the journey(s) |
| I was already familiar with (car, bus etc.)   |  |

Other – Please specify

.....

Q2A If you have any suggestions about how alternative travel options could have been better communicated please write them below.

.....

Q3 Thinking about the Chiltern journeys you needed to make during the period of disruption, how did you actually make them PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

By Chiltern Railways train  
By Virgin Trains  
By another Train Company  
By car  
By London Underground  
Walked

By coach  
By First Great Western  
By rail replacement bus  
By bicycle  
By taxi  
Decided to no longer make the journey(s)

Other – Please specify

.....  
Q3A How much extra time did the disruption add to *each leg* of your normal journey?

.....

**SECTION 2: YOUR SATISFACTION WITH HOW THE DISRUPTION WAS HANDLED**

Q4 Thinking about all of the journeys you made with Chiltern during the period of disruption please rate your satisfaction with the following

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Don't know/No opinion
Information initially provided on the Chiltern Railways website to alert you to the disruption						
Printed information directly available from Chiltern Railways						
Availability of information to plan alternative journeys						
Information available from the radio and newspapers						
Frequency of trains in replacement timetable						
Journey times in replacement timetable						
Availability of alternative car parking						
Quality of alternative car parking						
Frequency of replacement buses						
Timing of replacement buses to tie in with trains						
Comfort of replacement buses						
Availability of Chiltern staff						
Politeness of Chiltern staff						
Quality of information provided by Chiltern staff						
Quality of information provided by staff from other train companies						
Levels of £ compensation/discount on ticket price						
The overall handling of the disruption by Chiltern						



Q4A Do you have any suggestions about how any of these areas could have been improved?

.....  
.....  
.....

**SECTION 3: THE TYPES OF JOURNEY YOU MAKE WITH CHILTERN RAILWAYS**

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Q5 Which part of the Chiltern Railways network do you tend to travel on?

From ..... To.....

Q 6 For which of the following journey purposes do you use Chiltern Trains?  
PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Daily commuting to/from work .....
- Less regular commuting to/from work .....
- Daily commuting for education (to/from college/school/university).....
- Less regular commuting for education (to/from college/school/university) .....
- On company business (or own if self-employed).....
- On personal business (job interview, dentist etc) .....
- Visiting friends or relatives.....
- Shopping trip .....
- Travel to/from holiday .....
- A day out .....
- Sport .....
- Other leisure trip .....

**SECTION 4: EXPERIENCES NOW THAT GERRARDS CROSS DISRUPTION HAS ENDED**

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Q7 How did you find out that disruption to your Chiltern services had ended and services had returned to normal?

PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- |                                    |                                       |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Arrived at station and read notice | Arrived at station and spoke to staff |
| TV                                 | Radio                                 |
| Internet                           | Friends/family                        |
| By this questionnaire              |                                       |

Other – please specify

.....  
.....  
.....

Q8 Thinking about your experiences during the disruption caused by the tunnel collapse at Gerrards Cross, how has this affected the number of journeys you are likely to make with Chiltern Railways in the future?

- Likely to make far more journeys with Chiltern
  - Likely to make more journeys with Chiltern
  - Makes no difference to number of journeys with Chiltern
  - Likely to make fewer journeys with Chiltern
  - Likely to make far fewer journeys with Chiltern
- 

Q9 If you have any additional comments about the handling of the disruption caused by the collapse of the tunnel at Gerrards Cross please make them here.

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.....  
.....  
.....

**THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE**

## Appendix Two

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14 March 2006

**Ref: pf140306rpcsurvey**

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### **Gerrards Cross Passenger Attitude Survey**

I wanted to write and respond to the excellent survey which Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch carried out jointly last September into passengers' perceptions of Chiltern's handling of the tunnel collapse at Gerrards Cross last summer.

#### *Introduction*

We were firstly very pleased that Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch were able to dedicate resources to this research. We of course had an intensive level of liaison with and feedback from our customers during and after the incident, but your survey was very useful in targeting the passengers most affected, and in structuring their responses into a useable format.

Myself and our Sales & Marketing Director Kate Franklin have reviewed the survey results, and I have shared the highlights with our Managing Director, Cath Proctor. The Executive Summary has also been seen by the Chiltern Railways Passenger Board.

#### *Chiltern Staff*

At Chiltern, we were very pleased to see that the three areas which recorded the highest level of satisfaction were related to Chiltern staff, in particular, their politeness, their availability, and the level of information given out by them. The period after the tunnel collapse was an exceptionally demanding one for all Chiltern staff, as, with no notice at all, they coped well with the difficult operating circumstances which arose, against the backdrop of tension and concern surrounding the terrorist attacks on London which occurred one week later. Given these trying circumstances, it is very pleasing to see that passengers perceived that our staff remained visible and provided useful guidance.

#### *Areas of Dissatisfaction*

Your report also highlights the areas which recorded the lowest levels of satisfaction, and areas where there was a balance of dissatisfaction, these being: the times and frequency of trains in the replacement timetable, the levels of information available on TV and radio, the availability of alternative

car parking, and the compensation scheme. We have noted this feedback, and make the following response.

#### *Replacement Timetable*

The replacement timetable was written by our planners overnight on 30 June, and was available at 6am on 1 July, with hurriedly photocopied handouts available for passengers at the same time. By the middle of the next week, we had published a proper booklet, and updated that emergency timetable to double the frequency of trains north of Princes Risborough, and to lengthen and extend the operation of the West Ruislip shuttles to Denham. On balance, we believe that given the lack of notice, we actually planned the best timetables we possibly could have done. I should mention that Network Rail and London Underground were also exceptionally helpful, in the case of the former in lending us planning resources, and in the case of the latter by accepting short notice requests for diverted trains over their infrastructure. Neither company had any obligation to do this, so I am pleased to put on record our thanks to them. We understand entirely that passengers were nonetheless of the view that their journeys were materially and unacceptably degraded during the closure. I am afraid that there was simply nothing else we could have done to have provided more trains. After 8 July, all of our trains and drivers were in use, and we were using the full allocation of paths which it was possible to squeeze through London Underground's Metropolitan Line infrastructure, and the single line between Princes Risborough and Aylesbury. We were able, in the light of experience, and on a week by week basis to tweak the amended timetable, by adding a number of additional calls at Amersham and Great Missenden, in response to passenger demand. Ultimately, the best way to restore the normal frequency and journey time was to reopen the tunnel: we pressed Network Rail and the HSE to facilitate this as soon as they could safely do so.

#### *TV and Radio*

We have noted that a source of passenger dissatisfaction was the provision of information via TV and radio. We do have a process in place for disseminating information to the TV and radio travel news networks, and to Ceefax, which we used to its fullest extent. The snag can be that TV and radio travel news bulletins rarely have sufficient time to promulgate train by train detail, so a lot of the coverage we saw simply advised that the line was blocked, and that replacement buses and diversions were in place. To help supplement this information, our Press Office actively offered spokesmen to radio station, and in excess of 40 interviews were undertaken on local and national radio during the closure period. We also learnt a lot of lessons about provision of information via the internet, which this event, and the events of 7 July, showed us was becoming an ever more popular way for passengers intending to seek information. Early on during the disruption, our resources were extremely thinly stretched, and there were times where timetable information on the internet was not up to date. London TravelWatch were helpful in bringing this to our attention, and we were able to act quickly to update the gaps.

#### *Car Parking*

One area where we were surprised to see dissatisfaction was the provision of alternative car parking. We were aware from the first day of the disruption that a large number of passengers were electing not to use the replacement bus services, but instead to drive to an alternative station where there was a full train service in operation. Hence, a lot of Bicester and Haddenham passengers drove to Aylesbury; and a lot of High Wycombe passengers drove to Great Missenden and Amersham, and many Gerrards Cross and Beaconsfield passengers drove to Denham. Given that all of these alternative stations have

finite car park space, we were keen from the outset to find an alternative location for displaced passengers to park. By 6 July, we had completed negotiations with the owners, and with Buckinghamshire County Council, and taken a short term lease on space for free parking for 400 cars at Denham Aerodrome, from where passengers were taken to Denham station by free minibus. This helped to ease the load considerably on Denham, and probably Amersham and Great Missenden, but we do recognise that the car parks at all of the Met Line stations (all of which have been extended in recent years) became full.

### *Compensation*

One area where we were not surprised to see net dissatisfaction was the level of compensation provided. Right from the start, we decided that it would not have been acceptable to hide behind the fine print of the Passenger's Charter, and claim 'external impact' and so not compensate passengers.

We spent a great deal of effort considering the terms and conditions of the compensation scheme. Factors in our mind were:

- a. the need to quickly announce a compensation scheme, without waiting until the line reopened
- b. the need to devise a scheme which struck a balance between passengers expectations of a just level of compensation and our ability to persuade Tesco to stand behind it
- c. the need for us to discourage the leakage of passengers to other operators, to make sure that we still had some passengers left when the route reopened
- d. the need for us to devise a scheme which was simple for passengers and staff to understand, and was simple and quick for us to administer.
- e. At London TravelWatch's suggestion, we had regard to London Underground's unfortunate experience with a passenger compensation scheme following the Chancery Lane derailment, and were keen to avoid some of the difficulties encountered there.

One of our first engagements with Tesco was to get them to stand behind the compensation package. They did agree to do this, and we publicly launched the scheme on 20 July, the same time as ticket restrictions on alternative routes were reinstated. The scheme provided, on affected legs, for a 50% reduction in the cost of tickets, granted at source, and set out a process for existing season ticket holders to reclaim 50% of the cost of the ticket for the 7 weeks affected. Compensation was paid in cheques (not vouchers), or (at the passenger's option) was available in kind in the form of an extension to the validity of the ticket.

Our experience was that passengers dissatisfied with the scheme fell into three categories:

- a. Those who felt that the pro-rated level of compensation provided was insufficient to compensate the value of their time spent travelling over the longer routes which was lost to their employers and families;
- b. Those who had taken advantage of the lifting of ticket restrictions to use Chiltern tickets on other routes where they would not normally be valid who were annoyed when upon the introduction of the compensation scheme, easements on ticket restrictions on those other routes were removed;

- c. Those who took it upon themselves to buy tickets from alternative stations, which were not directly affected by the disruption, so did not qualify for compensation. For example, the High Wycombe to London flow was affected by the collapse so attracted a 50% discount, whereas the Great Missenden to London flow was unaffected, so did not. In this example, a High Wycombe to London passenger who drove to Great Missenden and bought a ticket from there to London would have received no discount / compensation, but would have done had they still bought their ticket from High Wycombe, but used it from Great Missenden. Some passengers, who had bought monthly tickets from the alternative station before the nature of the scheme was announced, felt that they had not received the compensation they were entitled to through no fault of their own.

I think it is true to say that the correspondence which reached London TravelWatch and Passenger Focus generally fell into one of the above categories.

In many respects, we successfully met our objectives: the scheme was easy to administer and understand, and a great many cheques were paid out in a short period of time. We were greatly aided by our decision to contract out the lion's share of the handling of claims to GNER's Customer Services in Newcastle, which helped make the administration of the scheme manageable. But in trying to create a simple scheme, there were inevitably passengers who fell outwith the scope of it, and felt that this was unfair. Passenger dissatisfaction with this decision has reached us too: we do recognise the point, and it would be at the forefront of our minds if we ever had to replicate the scheme in future. Like all other transport operators, the compensation we pay (for this and indeed any other incident) is linked to the price of the ticket, so does not encompass redress for consequential loss. To have offered to have done so would have created an open ended liability upon us which would not have been backed by Tesco, and which as a company, we could probably not have afforded. It seems to us that the only way that consequential loss compensation could be viably offered is when coupled to some sort of travel insurance scheme, financed by a levy on ticket prices. We do recognise that in many cases, the extent of time lost by our passengers could never really have been fully compensated by money. Passengers just wanted the normal service back, something we worked very hard to do once it was clear that the line was safe to reopen.

*Conclusion:*

In closing I would like to say that the second half of 2005 was without doubt the most difficult period in Chiltern's history. The tunnel collapse was followed in quick succession by two terrorist attacks on London, and a major factory fire which closed the line through Wembley for several days. We inevitably lost a lot of passengers during this period, but numbers are recovering, and confidence is returning. We naturally hope that nothing of this nature ever occurs again, but I think we can be confident in saying that were we ever to suffer a line closure on this scale again, thanks to passenger feedback and this London TravelWatch / Passenger Focus survey, we would be even better able to minimise the inconvenience which passengers suffered.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Cross  
Business Planning Manager  
Cc: Kate Franklin; David Whitley

## Appendix Three

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Note of meeting between London TravelWatch, Passenger Focus and Chiltern Railways – response to London TravelWatch/Passenger Focus passenger survey report on the Gerrards Cross tunnel collapse.

**31 May 2006**

**Attendees: Tim Bellenger (TB), Tony Shields (TS) – London TravelWatch, Paul Fullwood (PF) – Passenger Focus and Graham Cross (GC) – Chiltern Railways.**

1. TB explained need to finalise report and outcomes, especially to report back to the London Assembly on London TravelWatch activities.
2. GC outlined the nature of the Chiltern Railways Contingency Plan and how this had worked out in practice at the time of the tunnel collapse. The first timetable for operation on the following day was drafted overnight and ready at 6am. The call off contract with Fraser Eagle for replacement buses and a media strategy of keeping local radio and TV stations informed was implemented.
3. The website information flow however, did not go as well as it might have done. This was because there are two ways of loading information on to the website:-
  - a) Chiltern Trains Control centre passes Real Time information to Nexus Alpha, who then load on to Chiltern website and to National Rail website.
  - b) Front end changes to be done directly from Chiltern HQ.Some problems emerged – firstly the Chiltern HQ person who was capable of changing the front end just happened to be on leave at the time of the incident, and so it was only later that someone else was able to access and update the information at the front end. Secondly, the volume and complexity of the changes required was overwhelming for both Control and Nexus Alpha. The website also serves a wide range of other purposes.

### **Recommendation**

Chiltern recognised that because of its increasing importance that there was a need for more robust procedures and working practices to ensure that information on incidents is made available in a timely way.

4. Chiltern recognised that one of their failings during the incident was that internal communications in the company were of an informal nature, due to their small size. The size and complexity of the incident meant that this structure did not work well in terms of communicating information both to Chiltern and other TOC staff. PASSENGER FOCUS referred to survey data that showed poor information flow to staff had had a knock on effect to passengers. The company has therefore initiated change to improve and formalise internal communication in the light of the experience of the incident.

### **Recommendation**

The next business plan was therefore likely to include provision for changes to close this gap, which might include the replacement of pagers with PDA palm tops, and renewal of the CIS systems.

5. In this respect the role of the Passenger Information Manager is key. GC explained that the role of the PIM was to ensure that passengers are able to access accurate and up to date information via the website, station announcements and CIS systems. The PIM was also responsible for answering the Help Point long line telephones from stations along the route, and this could be quite disruptive. TS and TB queried this and suggested that the PIM's role in getting information out at a time of crisis would be made much easier if this person could be relieved of the task of answering these Help Points – which in any case would have increased due to the very nature of the incident. TS explained that his experience of crisis management in other industries, that there was a need for this type of role to be made one step removed from direct dealing with the public, in order to concentrate on more important tasks.

### **Recommendation**

GC agreed that this was an area that should be looked again from an incident management view. He noted however, that all available Chiltern office based staff were helping out in all sorts of roles on stations during the incident above and beyond their normal duties. The PIM also had role in activating long line announcements to stations and coordinating this with the Customer Information Systems.

6. The temporary timetable was a 'work in progress' that had to cope with a number of uncertainties, particularly the lack of knowledge of when, if at all, the route was re-opened. The process of information dissemination was not helped by the 'drip-drip' of iterations to the timetable as operation experience and passenger requests were incorporated. This added extra complexity, and was not helped by the subsequent events of 7<sup>th</sup> July (terrorist attack and closure of London Underground infrastructure) and 14<sup>th</sup> July (fire at adjacent buildings to the lineside at Wembley), which caused further disruption to an already difficult situation.

### **Recommendation**

It was agreed that passengers really needed stability in knowing what services were operating on an emergency timetable, therefore in future it would be recommended that iterations should be limited – and passenger groups may have to be also self-disciplined in restricting the number of requests for changes.

7. Bus service information. It was clear that this was an area which could have been improved upon. Buses had been welcome at the start of the incident but became less so as time went on. There many survey comments about poor information, and lack of bus marshals at the appropriate times – also some stations it was not clear where the buses were operating from e.g. Denham.

### **Recommendation**

TB suggested that Chiltern could for minimal expenditure follow the London Underground practice of agreeing and marking with a flag, bus stops at each station which would be used at time of emergency or engineering works. GC agreed to consider this. TB also undertook to forward a copy of London TravelWatch's research paper 'When is a train not a train' which sets out standards for the operation of rail replacement services.



8. Positive comments had been received about the personal letters from Cath Proctor as Managing Director.
9. Alternative routeings. These had lasted much longer than had been expected. Cooperation with other operators and Network Rail was excellent. Virgin and

London Underground had been particularly helpful, with Virgin making it clear that Chiltern's previous aid to them as a result of the West Coast Main Line upgrade meant that this was 'pay back' time. However, there were some difficulties that arose when the scheme was terminated. Hindsight would have suggested that the alternative routeings arrangement should have been finished earlier. Passenger feedback and figures since the incident have indicated that many of those passengers who used alternative routes during the closure period have remained with those other operators e.g. London Underground from Amersham, Virgin from the West Midlands.

10. Compensation policy. This could have been better publicised but was hampered by the fact that it was difficult to communicate easily with passengers using alternative routeings. The level of compensation was limited because Tesco would not have supported a more generous scheme.
11. Future plans. Subject to Board and DfT approval the next Chiltern Railways business plan would reflect many of the lessons learned from the Gerrards Cross incident.

**Tim Bellenger**  
**London TravelWatch**  
**6 June 2006**