‘Edge of morning peak travel’ – Research findings prepared for Passenger Focus by Consolidated

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Passengerfocus
putting rail passengers first

‘EDGE OF MORNING PEAK’ TRAVEL

Research findings
Prepared for Passenger Focus
By Consolidated

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Introduction

During week day peak travel periods (8-9 a.m.) key London rail commuter stations are suffering increasing congestion and overcrowding.

This is unpleasant for passengers now and because London passenger numbers are forecast to increase the situation can only get worse. The long term solution to the problem - the physical remodelling of commuter stations to cope with greater demand – will be costly and disruptive to the travelling public. A short/medium term solution to the problem is to motivate peak time passengers to travel at off-peak times.

Traditional ticket pricing policies are effective at managing demand for travel but they penalise those passengers who cannot afford not to travel at peak times – so how can congestion be alleviated more fairly?

The hypothesis of Passenger Focus was that a segment of current peak time passengers could travel at off-peak times and if sufficient numbers of them could be persuaded to do so, on a regular basis, congestion will be relieved. Failure to deliver a long-term behaviour change in sufficient numbers of passengers will not alleviate congestion.

To establish if this hypothesis was reasonable and worthy of larger scale, more detailed research Passenger Focus commissioned a short exploratory qualitative research project designed to identify triggers to behavioural change around passenger travelling time.

Several important findings emerged which the authors believe if tested further on a wider audience and subsequently proved would contribute to the task of motivating change in the commuting public.

The principle finding of the research was that a substantial minority of passengers agreed that it would be possible to persuade them to avoid peak commuting times but that it would not be a simple task. Financial incentives were key to motivating this change in behaviour, although other factors also played important roles.

The following report describes these findings in greater detail.

- Section 1 provides insight into the degree of perceived control and flexibility that passengers have.
- Section 2 provides insight into the key barriers to off-peak morning travel that passengers have.
- Section 3 provides insight into the key incentives to travel at off-peak times for passengers
- Section 4 details the commuting experience passengers face.

- Section 5 provides insight into the likely passenger response to a proposed poster campaign intended to motivate them to change their travel times.

Exploratory research objectives

The function of the research was to establish the factors that would motivate passengers who have the flexibility to change their commuting behaviour to do so; to challenge those findings sufficiently robustly to find out how certain we can be that passengers would actually change their behaviour and establish those factors over which the rail industry has some influence.

The information Passenger Focus specifically sought was:

- Why passengers travel when they do, when they don't have to?
- If passengers are influenced by factors such as purpose of travel, frequency of commute etc?
- On which occasions passengers travel outside of these times and why?
- What would incentivise passengers to travel at off-peak times?
- What is the likelihood of those passengers changing their travel behaviour?

Methodology

The methodology comprised two elements – short 'intercept interviews' conducted at Waterloo Station and a subsequent series of five focus groups:

1. Intercept interviews

Intercept interviews were designed to provide a quick, cost efficient, snapshot of passenger's motivations to travel at peak times and their possible motives to change their patterns of travel. Results from this information informed the focus group discussion guide. 173 intercept interviews were conducted amongst a broad cross section of passengers at Waterloo station over three days between 8am and 9am on the 5-7 April (inc).

Passengers were asked:

- Do you have to travel at peak times (if not why do you?)
- What would motivate you to change your travel patterns?
- What are the key barriers to changing your travel patterns?

2. Focus groups

The methodology had at its heart five focus groups which were conducted between 18-25 April. Groups were recruited from a carefully chosen cross-section of peak time passengers into Waterloo station. A detailed description of the audiences interviewed can be found in Appendix 1. In brief they were:

Group 1: Commute within one hour to Waterloo

Group 2: Commute greater than one hour to Waterloo

Group 3: Students

Group 4: Less affluent commuters

Group 5: More affluent commuters

Summary Findings

Intercept research

- Of those interviewed about three out of ten people (41%) said that they could be persuaded to arrive at Waterloo station outside of the peak time period.
- Less than one in ten (6%) of all interviewees would consider travelling later, most preferred to travel earlier or either earlier or later.
- Work commitments were the only significant factor stopping interviewees from arriving after 9am with more than four out of ten (45%) interviewees citing it as their main reason.
- Although work commitments stopped a third of all interviewees from arriving before 8am another third didn't arrive before 8am because they simply couldn't be bothered to travel earlier.
- When asked what the rail industry could do to motivate passengers to travel at off-peak times more than five out of ten (56%) suggested reducing fares. Improved frequency of service was mentioned by about two out of ten (16%) interviewees and greater comfort (including more seats) was mentioned by about one in ten (14%) interviewees. These motivators were subsequently reflected in the focus group findings.

N.B. Although 173 intercept interviews took place, and it is possible to quantify the findings, the intercept research was never designed to be quantitative and the findings should be seen as indicative only.

Focus group research

Attitude to the hypothesis in general

- Passengers in each of the focus groups felt that they could be incentivised to change their travel times.
- Although force of habit among passengers is strong there was sufficient evidence to indicate that it can be overcome.
- Even passengers with entrenched viewpoints could be persuaded to consider alternative travel timings by being prompted to think about their routine and exposing them to different ideas and ways of behaving.
- The control that passengers had over their journeys depended on several factors the most important of which were work commitments and the distance they travelled to get to Waterloo.
- The degree to which passengers were prepared to be flexible in their behaviour depended on several factors the most important of which was seasonality. Passengers were more prepared to be flexible in the Spring and Summer months rather than in the Autumn and Winter.

- The key benefit that passengers felt they would attain through a change in their travel behaviour was an optimisation of their leisure time.
- A good journey was seen as setting passengers up for the day ahead - off-peak travel was closely associated with this 'good rail experience'. By tapping into these passenger perceptions the rail industry has an opportunity to motivate more passengers to alter their travel times. However, there are significant barriers to overcome.

Barriers to behaviour change

- Passengers will not change their journey times if they feel that an off-peak service is going to be unreliable. This is critical. A minority expressed the view that this was likely to be the case and because there were fewer trains at off-peak times the unreliability was more of a problem especially if travelling with the intention of arriving after 9am. A guarantee of reliability would help.
- In terms of targeting different passenger groups it will be harder to persuade those with longer journeys to change their behaviour than those with shorter journeys.
- Getting passengers to get up earlier will be *very* difficult, particularly in the winter. The Spring and Summer months present the best opportunity to encourage earlier rail travel.
- Security at railway stations was not a top of mind issue despite extensive media coverage. However it gained in importance as a deterrent to travelling at off-peak times as soon as it was discussed.

Incentives to behaviour change

- Financial reward was not top of mind amongst passengers in terms of the incentive they felt would be most likely to change their travel behaviour but once it was mentioned by an individual in a group it became the dominant incentive.
- Discounts in the region of 25%-30% were sought by passengers.
- Passengers wanted to feel that they were being rewarded for 'good behaviour' rather than penalised for 'bad behaviour' They resented pricing strategies that penalised peak travel and ticketing strategies that forced them into travelling at certain times. They liked the idea that the reward for off-peak travel might accrue in some way and that tickets could be flexible enough to reward them when they travelled at off-peak times and not penalise them when they didn't. This led inevitably to a discussion about how this could be done and the importance of ticketing systems similar to the Oyster card.
- Although work commitments were critical to passenger flexibility it was the importance of leisure time which was critical to persuading them to change their travel times.

- Even passengers who were less flexible about when they could travel because of work or educational commitments were still susceptible to lifestyle incentives.
- Among passengers for whom there was little or no benefit in arriving early at work the rail industry will have to provide a sense of purpose to address their 'what's in it for me' attitude. This attitude was prevalent among less affluent passengers and could be addressed by communicating the lifestyle benefit of an earlier start e.g. going to the gym, relaxing with a coffee etc.
- Lifestyle incentives were not sufficiently motivating on their own but were favoured when combined with other incentives e.g. a financial incentive plus a guarantee of comfort.
- Whilst passengers strongly associated peak travel with 'unreasonable' expense they did not tend to associate off-peak travel with cost saving. If the rail industry is to affect change it will have to better associate financial advantage with off-peak travel.

Communications

- A very basic poster concept designed to motivate off-peak travel was tested on passengers. It suggested that there were more seats available on specific trains. It was understood by all but few found it motivating.
- Communications that tap into the passenger desire to be more in control of their journeys will be more effective.
- To optimise the likely success of incentives communications should be timed to coincide with the Spring and Summer months as most passengers found it easier to get up earlier during these months.
- Although passenger's perceived off-peak travel to be both functionally and emotionally beneficial they preferred the tone of communications to be more emotional.
- In the context of the proposed poster campaign the rail industry should note the resentment caused by empty seats in First Class carriages. A campaign that highlights empty seats on other trains draws attention to the empty seats in First Class on the passenger's normal train.

SECTION 1 - CONTROL AND FLEXIBILITY

The purpose of this chapter is to show the degree of control and flexibility different types of passengers have over their journeys and also what affects that control and flexibility - can they actually change?

KEY FINDINGS

- Work or educational commitments impose the greatest constraints on commuter's capacity to alter their travelling times
- Passengers acknowledge that habitual behaviour is hard to break
- Some passengers will never change their habits
- Passengers feel that the rail industry could do more to educate employers in terms of allowing flexitime to be worked
- Longer distance passengers can still be incentivised to travel earlier or later though earlier travel is more problematic
- Motivating passengers to 'get out of bed' in the morning at a different time is a significant hurdle
- Passenger flexibility improves in the Spring and Summer
- Amongst passengers interviewed responsibility for/dependence on others was not an issue in terms of the timing of their commute
- Giving passengers the feeling they are more 'in charge' of their journey will assist communications

Work or educational commitments

Two types of work pressure dictating passenger's travel timing were revealed in the research. This information could be used to assist targeting of passenger segments susceptible to altering their travel timing.

1. Imposed inflexibility. This was found among passengers whose travelling flexibility was dictated by their employer.

These tended to be individuals working flexi-time or often shop workers whose place of employment didn't open until 9.30 or 10 a.m. For either group their working hours meant that they had to be at their place of work by a certain time and finish at a certain time.

Group 2: Commute greater than one hour to Waterloo

W:	It doesn't make any difference to me. I think most people, even if they have not got flexible hours, can get into work earlier. It is just that they won't be able to leave earlier. Who wants to get in at 7.00am if you cannot leave early?

Group 4: Less affluent commuters

W:	Yes but, well for me personally travelling on the off-peak is like just getting from A to B basically and then in to work. Basically I want to be able to do the little things that I want to do personally you know, go to the gym and stuff like that. The leisure things that you want to do you know, to kind of make your morning and kind of get you ready for the day

For other passengers there was often no career benefit in arriving early at work which was particularly the case for the less affluent passengers. There was simply nothing for them to do early at work and the option of hanging around waiting to start work was obviously unappealing.

Group 4: Less affluent commuters

W:	It just makes the day too long.
W:	Because you are hanging around looking for things to do.

However passengers did think that there were benefits in terms of social and leisure activities that could take place before work such as going to the gym or socialising after work.

N.B. Although these findings were particularly relevant to the least affluent commuter group the intercept research revealed that the group of individuals who most consistently had the least control over their flexibility were passengers travelling to the City of London financial district. Their dress and use of taxi to get from Waterloo to the city were reasonable indicators of wealth. Therefore for segmentation purposes the type of job undertaken and nature of employer is as important as level of income.

The student group faced a similar imposed inflexibility. Just as 'working' passengers had to abide by their working hours the students interviewed couldn't miss lectures. This didn't mean that it wasn't possible for them to be flexible on some of their journeys

Group 3: Students

W:	I have to be there at a certain time but I normally go in earlier and have a coffee before I go in. I normally get in there at about 8.45am.
W:	Yes, but it is because I choose to travel early. If I chose to kind of be there at the exact time then I would be more rushed and I would be worried about delays and things. I choose to go in earlier just because it makes it easier.

2. Self – imposed inflexibility. This was found among passengers who had complete control over their own timetables but choose to 'get in early' to work or see clients.

These tended to be career minded individuals and they could be found in all groups except the least affluent group and student group. Their level of control varied between and within groups.

Group 5: More affluent commuters

W:	Well I can get in later, it's my choice, I like to get in earlier if I can because I get there say after 9.30am and it's hectic. It's like that downtime you have in the morning to get your to do list done before people come in from every angle. So I can get there later but I end up staying later as well. So it really depends on my mood. I haven't got strict 9.00am to 5.00pm hours because that's not my industry

Group 5: More affluent commuters

M:	I think as this lady said here, it can be more relaxing and you can get all those little things you want to do out of the way, the working day hasn't properly started, you check your personal e-mails, whatever, check the news from last night, sort out the to-do list and actually, by the time everybody else is turning up, you're ready for it.

Interestingly passengers in all groups changed their minds about when they would be prepared to travel (early or late) at different times during the discussions. They often started 'inflexibly' but over the course of the discussion they were influenced by suggestions from other group members. Therefore it is clearly possible to influence even the most entrenched point of view by prompting thought on the subject and exposing the individual to different ideas.

This was particularly true of those passengers who lived within an hour's commute to Waterloo. At the start of the session all were adamant that they could not change the time of their daily commute, however after some discussion they had changed their mind.

The role of the employer

Some passengers suggested that it might be more fruitful to persuade employers to change their working hours rather than expecting employees to alter theirs.

Group 2: Commute greater than one hour to Waterloo

W:	I think they should start educating business, whether it is through media campaigns but they should, getting this idea across … that there are big problems for people travelling, let's be more flexible with our working hours for our staff because I think that is such a big thing. If they could break that then companies would start getting more responsive because so many people are happy to get there by a certain hour.

The impracticality of everyone working at different times so that nobody could communicate with anyone else created an amused consensus around the principle of workers changing their hours.

Journey times

Journey times contribute significantly to passenger travel flexibility. The group with the furthest to travel felt they had the least control over their commute. The need to get out of bed considerably earlier than their usual routine to be at Waterloo before 8.00 a.m. was particularly problematic. Although other groups stressed the pull of 'bed' (see below), for this group it was significantly stronger.

Group 2: Commute greater than one hour to Waterloo

W:	I am very set. The only way I can move it is by moving closer in so that I would have more flexibility between the times, but I am very guided by a set time that I have to leave in the morning and the train I have to get in the evening. I would love to. I would love to be more flexible but then I would be getting up so early to come into work.
W:	To get in for 8.00am I would have to leave the house at 6.30am.

Travelling to arrive at Waterloo later than 9.00 a.m. was understandably easier for this group though not necessarily any more appealing.

Group 2: Commute greater than one hour to Waterloo

W:	I get in for 8.00am and sometimes I get in for 10.00am I have a late day. My employer is very flexible and I am lucky but even though they are flexible you cannot choose or take the piss. I work for an employer who is flexible
W:	Yes but when I get in at 10.00am that means I get home later, which means that I do not get as much time at home and then I am not as well rested and I still have to get up at 5.00am or 5.30am the next morning.

The power of bed

The amount of time passengers got in bed was deemed critical for passengers in all but the less and more affluent groups. It represents a significant hurdle to overcome.

Group 3: Students

W:	It takes me 45 minutes to get in ... I don't like the idea of getting up before 7.00am
W:	I would rather get up later and be up later, stay up later in the evening. I work in the evening so normally I am up later and I don't want to get up at 7.00am

Group 2: Commute greater than one hour to Waterloo

M:	You have to go to bed earlier as well and I find it really hard to regulate when I go to sleep. Like I always get involved in a book or something good on telly and it's like suddenly it's midnight.

Seasonal flexibility

A broad cross section of passengers spontaneously talked about the effect of seasonality being a major influence on the time of their commute - principally because it made it harder or easier to get out of bed.

Unsurprisingly winter months were seen in a negative context – people simply did not want to travel when it was cold or dark.

The flip side of this was that at least one passenger in each group initiated a debate about how much easier and motivating it was to travel earlier on light, late spring or summer mornings. People woke earlier and there was a suggestion that it was more of a pleasure to travel early.

Group 1: Commute within one hour to Waterloo

W:	I'd only do it maybe in summertime or late spring to sort of autumn when the weather's better and everything and you tend to feel better

Group 2: Commute greater than one hour to Waterloo

W:	It is quite nice getting up earlier in the summer.
M:	Yes don't you think it opens the whole day up because you are going to work in the light and coming back in the light?

Group 5: More affluent commuters

W:	You could do summer saver early, the early months, and the winter save being in the winter months or something like that. So people can make those choices

Group 3: Students

W:	Yes, and it is still dark outside and in the winter it is freezing cold and you feel like it is kind of 3.00am and you should not be wandering around kind of trying to travel places. You should be tucked up in bed.

Responsibility for or dependence on others

The presumption before the research took place was that among passengers who have parental duties or are reliant on 'lifts to the station' etc. that this would play a significant part in the amount of flexibility that they had over when they travelled. In fact few individuals were affected and these were almost all concentrated in the more affluent group. Their group profile was slightly older than other groups and they were more family oriented. So their main blocks to changing their travel times included family commitments, which they would have found difficult to meet if they were leaving work earlier. It would be worth further exploration of the impact of age and family status on the propensity to alter travel times.

Group 5: More affluent commuters

M:	If everybody's up I'd rather go in at 8.00am and be back for 6.00pm which creates much more time for the kids
W:	I'm very much dictated by my children, I can't leave too early in the morning because they're not out of the house

Habit

Some passengers did not think in any way about their journeys, they had never considered it or thought of altering it – other than when it went wrong. In fact many passengers were bemused by the question why do you travel when you do. Many just felt it was what you do, and the routine had been conditioned to do from school onwards.

Group 1: Commute within one hour to Waterloo

W:	...everybody starts around that time and finishes [at 5], that's why the majority of people have to do it.

Group 2: Commute greater than one hour to Waterloo

W:	No it is part of your daily routine. Well it is your routine.

Group 4: Less affluent commuters

W:	I officially start work at 10.00 but I have always got in by about 9.15am. So if I now started being later it would be noticed. Do you know what I mean? So I probably could be later if I wanted but I do not like getting in until 10.00am because it is too late and now that I have got that pattern, do you know what I mean?

Interestingly there are passengers who could avoid the stress of rush hour but don't and then spend time and money recovering to prepare them for the day ahead:

Group 4: Less affluent commuters

W:	I go to the gym first, so I could actually go in after 9.00am. I start work at 10.00am as well. I choose to get in at about 8.30am to Waterloo so I can go to the gym
W:	Yes I just like to kind of chill out and just kind of get my head together for the day

It also became evident that some people will never change their habits:

Group 4: Less affluent commuters

W:	Because, as I say, I really am not a morning person and the thought of getting up an hour earlier so as to get in at 8.00am, I would just hate it. I would hate it.

Why putting the consumer back in charge matters

Although the following view was expressed by only one person, it was met with widespread agreement within the whole group.

Group 1: Commute within one hour to Waterloo

W:	It's the only thing you pay for in advance and then don't get. You go to a restaurant and order a meal and if it's rubbish you don't pay for it. You go to the train, you buy your ticket and commit to it…, and you actually pay for it in advance and you don't get [the service], so they are in control of it, they've got your money. You can't go "Ha, sorry, service was rubbish this morning I'm not paying for it" because you already have. So they're kind of, … a bit of a win-win situation.

Putting the customer back in charge in some way may well help encourage individuals who feel similarly to change their travel times.

This was expressed by others in a slightly less frustrated way:

Group 1: Commute within one hour to Waterloo

M:	Yes, I think work can be flexible to a point but at the end of the day it's the individual decision because you're going to put more time in, work generally wants you there between a certain period. No-one I don't think works 9.00am to 5.00am anyway, everyone will go in a little bit earlier or go in at 9.00am and work until 6.00pm or 7.00pm or whatever because that's just the way, like you were saying, we work too hard. So the onus is on us on how we want to give you that time up, whether we want to stay later or whether we want to go in earlier.

The less affluent commuter group were an interesting change as they generally started work after 9 a.m. but still chose to travel during peak times to prepare themselves for the day ahead because it helped them to feel in control.

Group 4: Less affluent commuters

W:	There's nothing worse than not unwinding before the office, it means I'm not in control

SECTION 2 – BARRIERS TO OFF-PEAK MORNING TRAVEL

The purpose of this section is to identify the key barriers that the rail industry can influence to help persuade passengers, who can be flexible in their travel times, to switch either permanently to off-peak times or to do so more frequently.

KEY FINDINGS

- Passenger trust in the reliability of the rail service is critical
- Passengers perceive the rail service to be more reliable during peak times
- Passengers must have a sense of purpose for their change in behaviour
- Security is an issue although it isn't top of mind
- Parenting requirements, connections and car parking were least relevant to passengers in terms of disincentives to travel
- Work requirements, 'what's in it for me' and seasonality were most relevant to passengers in terms of disincentives to travel

Arriving at Waterloo before 8 a.m.

Reliability

If passengers did not feel they could trust the reliability of the rail service, when they had made the effort to change their behaviour, and many did not, then they would not change their behaviour. This view was unanimous among all groups. There is an obvious communications need for information and reassurance around this point if passengers are going to be persuaded to travel at off-peak times.

Groups: All

M:	Peak gives me more choice and off-peak doesn't feel that different anyway
W:	I don't like to run the risk of a delay, I like breathing time

Group 2: Commute greater than one hour to Waterloo

W:	If I knew trains would definitely run I would probably be a lot more flexible about when I travelled

The perception that peak time trains are more reliable than off-peak trains was echoed in many groups.

Group 4: Less affluent commuter

W:	It depends where you live though because I have found that doing temp work and stuff like that, if you start work at 10.00am but you leave it until after the 9.00am trains I used to find so many delays would just suddenly happen in that hour and I would be late. So it just seems that rush hour is the only time it is really reliable.

A sense of purpose

If the rail industry is to motivate passengers to change to earlier travel times it is critical a sense of purpose is communicated to receptive passenger segments. It was mentioned above that many passengers perceived no advantage in their being at work earlier or later – they just had to work the hours expected of them (or attend the relevant lectures), that getting out of bed was very difficult, that their social lives might be adversely affected by a change in their behaviour, that their journeys were simply too long, that they would be thought badly of by their work colleagues if they arrived after 9 a.m. etc. Obviously it is beyond the power of the rail industry to influence these things but their disincentivising qualities should be factored into communications.

All passengers needed a sense of purpose – a reason to justify a change in their behaviour. This was particularly relevant among passengers within the less affluent group. Many of them worked in areas where their hours were fixed (e.g. admin, reception, and help desk). For groups of passengers the issue was what they would do with the extra time it created. They needed to be persuaded that this extra time would not be 'lost' and that it could be used to their advantage.

The more affluent group was quite different. Although they did not like the idea of getting up earlier or having longer days many of this group had greater control over the hours they worked meaning that earlier starts meant earlier finishes. They could see the advantage of a change in their behaviour because they saw its purpose.

Group 4: More affluent commuters

W:	I haven't got strict 9.00am to 5.00pm hours because that's not my industry
M:	I work for a company when I can do shift work and I tend to take the 10.00am until 6.00pm so I can have that extra half an hour in bed

Arriving at Waterloo after 9 a.m.

Again reliability was an issue for all groups and work expectations was a major block for passengers in each of the groups.

Passengers in all groups except the more affluent group didn't like the idea of their days becoming longer. The least affluent group felt particularly strongly about this and no passengers liked the idea of going in later.

Groups: All except more affluent passengers

W:	It doesn't mean that your day is shorter because you've still got to be there until 6.00pm whatever, so you've just got a longer day
M:	I just feel a big chunk in the day has gone

Not everyone was against the idea of arriving later. Some passengers in the group commuting an hour into Waterloo and all of those in the student group didn't consider themselves to be 'morning people' so welcomed the extra time in bed. They were not concerned by the thought of a longer day. The students would be prepared to go in later regardless of the consequences as long as there was a suitable financial incentive.

Group 1: Commute within one hour to Waterloo

W:	I'd love to go in one hour later, it would be perfect!

Security

The issue of security was raised as much by men as it was by women, but always with the security of women in mind. It wasn't top of mind and tended to emerge late in most group discussions. Often the discussion was stimulated by the topic of seasonality and travelling in the dark or earlier in the morning at unmanned stations which all passengers found the most threatening.

Security was also prompted by the stimulus material on possible disincentives to off-peak rail travel. Amongst the within one hour commute to Waterloo passengers and the most affluent passengers security emerged as one of the most significant disincentives to altering travel patterns.

As part of the security debate some passengers wanted their departure stations to be more welcoming.

Group 1: Commute within one hour to Waterloo

M:	Well, there's also this thing with women get attacked because some stations are completely empty, it's not a problem for me, but you hear about it.

Group 2: Commute greater than one hour to Waterloo

W:	That is another thing actually if you are doing a long journey and you have to travel early. It is that whole thing of getting to the station and the station is quiet or what ever.

Group 4: More affluent commuters

W:	It's a winter thing and I just find it unbearable travelling at that time in the morning when it's still dark and I feel like I should still be in bed. It's that horrible feel of "Why am I doing this, why am I living here and doing all this?" and I don't like getting to the station when there's nobody there, you feel like "I am at the station" and there should be one of those big whirly things that you get in Westerns that rolls down the, it's all sort of.

Disincentives to travel at off-peak times

When shown stimulus material (see Appendix 4) with a list of possible disincentives to travel at off-peak times all of the groups felt that at least some did not apply to them.

The least relevant disincentives across all groups were parenting and car parking. However due to their age and lifestyle the student group felt that none of the listed possible disincentives were particularly relevant to them. The need to make travel connections was deemed irrelevant by all groups except those travelling furthest and students.

The most relevant disincentives for the students, under one hour passengers to Waterloo and the over one hour passengers to Waterloo were work requirements and 'what's in it for me?' Seasonality was also a big issue for students.

In contrast the less affluent group felt the most relevant disincentives were time in bed, habit and reliability. The more poorly paid could least afford to jeopardise their jobs.

Inevitably the effect of the stimulus material was to focus passenger's thoughts on factors that previously might not have been so important:

- Security emerged as one of the most significant disincentives for the under one hour passengers to Waterloo group and the more affluent group.
- Time in bed became a greater hurdle being popular among passengers in the student and one hour passengers to Waterloo groups
- Habit became a bigger hurdle for the students and more affluent

Work requirements were ranked as the principle barrier for passengers among the less than and more than one hour commute to Waterloo groups.

The student and less affluent groups prioritised bed as the greatest hurdle, although work commitments came a close second.

Despite not being mentioned in the discussion itself the more affluent group listed parenting duties as the biggest hurdle.

Interestingly the time they would leave work was also one of the top three hurdles for the less affluent groups because they didn't like the prospect of longer days. This contradicts the fact that they were almost equally split between those who would travel in later and those who would be prepared to travel in either earlier or later.

Amongst all groups the best way to overcome the hurdles was some form of financial reward.

Groups: All

M:	I think if it was a lot cheaper more people would just do it for the cash.
M:	I think that the one genuine incentive to encourage people to travel outside peak times is financial, reduce the cost for people travelling let's say before 8.00am and after 9.00am

SECTION 3 – INCENTIVES TO TRAVEL AT OFF-PEAK TIMES

The purpose of this section is to identify the key incentives that the rail industry can influence to help persuade passengers, who can be flexible in their travel times, to switch either permanently to off-peak times or to do so more frequently.

KEY FINDINGS

- 'Travel comfort' was most top of mind of any incentive to change travel times
- Guarantees of reliability were also critical
- Shortening the peak period was seen as useful
- Optimising leisure time was seen as a key purpose for changing travel times (not optimising work opportunities)
- Lifestyle incentives were discussed and dismissed as impractical
- Financial incentives to change travel times did not have a high saliency but once suggested they became the dominant incentive
- The discounts expected were high – in the region of 25-30%
- A few passengers valued 'time' more highly than money
- Translating financial incentives into meaningful everyday terms (equal to the value of gym membership etc) was widely believed to be an effective means of communication
- Combination incentives (e.g. financial incentives plus guarantees of comfort etc.) were also widely believed to be effective
- A majority of passengers agreed that financial incentives should be administered via a flexible/clever delivery mechanism such as an Oyster card
- The delivery of a financial 'reward' was widely seen as more incentivising than a straightforward price cut
- To optimise the effect of incentives they should coincide with the favourable off-peak travel seasons of spring and summer
- In terms of stimulus material financial incentives, a reliable service, a comfortable journey and security (in that order) were deemed most important
- Passengers did feel that they could be motivated to change but that it would not be easy

Comfort

Passengers were unanimous in their agreement that one of the best ways of persuading them to alter their travel times was the provision of a more comfortable journey.

Passengers travelling under an hour to Waterloo were most concerned with being uncomfortable because they always had to stand on very crowded journeys. Passengers travelling over an hour into Waterloo were most frustrated by the lack of ventilation and travel information because they were travelling the greatest distance. Students were frustrated by the lack of comfort particularly the cramped conditions and aggressive environment caused by the sheer volume of people travelling. The most affluent group was frustrated most by the effect a bad journey had on the rest of their day.

'Comfort' as an incentive was a double edged sword. Although passengers felt that a comfortable journey might motivate them to change their travel times many couldn't understand why their current travelling conditions were so uncomfortable.

Group 2: Commute greater than one hour to Waterloo

W:	I have got a bugbear because they have taken all the windows out of the trains, all of the opening windows out of the trains. So you usually get on and it is too hot, too cold. There is no sort of ventilation.
M:	Not to me. It is just the physical discomfort that is the biggest issue with me.

Group 3: Students

M:	It matters. I fight for my seats, I get on that train and I fight with my feet. But it is important because you are on there for half an hour and you have got to get up and run to your next train and then I want to sit down there and get on another train you know. It is a lot of walking and running about in the morning

The unfairness of rail travel was also mentioned.

Group 1: Commute within one hour to Waterloo

M:	Also you pay the same amount as someone else who's got a seat and it seems slightly unfair.

Reliability

The provision of a reliability guarantee was suggested by passengers as a useful incentive to change their travel times. Until this happened many would not consider changing their routines.

Group 2: Commute greater than one hour to Waterloo

W:	If I knew trains would definitely run on time I would alter my train times

Passengers in the commuter group travelling over an hour into Waterloo wanted a combination of reliability with increased communications and felt a mix of the two would help them to travel earlier. The improved communication would help reassure them about the improved reliability.

Group 2: Commute greater than one hour to Waterloo

W:	It is the lack of communication that is irritating. If you do stop somewhere and they do not tell you what is going on and you stand there and stand there or sit there for 10 minutes and no one says anything.

Tighter shoulder peak options

The idea of tighter shoulder peak options was raised in all of the groups although it was of most interest to the less and more affluent groups. Many passengers thought that the current peak period was too long meaning that they were unable to take advantage of any off-peak savings or benefits. A suggestion was to alter peak times to between 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. Most passengers felt this would make them more receptive to changing their train times.

Interestingly some passengers were not aware there was a price difference for travelling at different times.

Optimising leisure time

Passengers believed that one significant benefit of travelling earlier or later was to optimise their leisure time before or after work:

Group 1: Commute within one hour to Waterloo

M:	Also it gives you more time in the evenings to do something. You can stretch out an evening. So it's worth going in early, but I never go in later because I just get back home too late.
W:	I've got a gym at work so I'd probably try and use that more if I'd benefit in different ways.

When the debate switched, later, to include cost incentives some passengers were even more motivated to travel later.

Group 1: Commute within one hour to Waterloo

M:	I like to go out in the evening and so the idea of getting in before, when you want us to get into Waterloo, might be a bit harder in a sense, but if I knew it was flexible I can maybe work it around my lifestyle, maybe get in there sometimes earlier, sometimes normal times

…and when passengers began to consider their family commitments they became still more motivated to travel later:

M:	It all depends on, if you've got partners and stuff if they don't have to get up until 9.00 a.m. I'm not going to get out of bed an hour and a half earlier just to save £1 or something

Group 5: More affluent commuters

M:	I'm pretty flexible, as long as I'm in at about 10.00am, as a rule, if I've got a meeting then, a normal office day which isn't that often but in for 10.00am then that's fine, and if that's the case I do try and take advantage of it. But the other side of the coin is generally I'll work later, that means not seeing the kids so much and so it's a balancing act in terms of when I go in and when I come out.

Lifestyle incentives

Lifestyle incentives were discussed by all groups but ultimately dismissed as being insufficient on their own or impractical.

Several passengers mentioned the appeal of 'early bird' discounts on products such as coffee or a massage when they arrived at Waterloo. Others suggested there should be TV on the train. Such additions, it was felt, helped to create a more comfortable experience which was what mattered to most passengers.

Groups 1 & 3: Commute within one hour to Waterloo & Students

M:	I want to earn points on my Oyster card so when he comes round I can just beep my Oyster card on it and they give you free beverages
M:	It's not a major turning point but it all helps to put forward the idea that it could be slightly preferable, it's a very subtle thing.

Financial incentives

With most groups only one or two passengers spontaneously raised the idea of discounting ticket prices, unlike the issue of comfort. However once 'the genie was out of the bottle' it began to dominate the conversation.

Group 1: Commute within one hour to Waterloo

M:	And if you knocked off a certain amount and said "Right, over a year this amount of times you have to be at Waterloo before 8.00am" then yes, I could do that, I'd be interested in doing that.

The student group were highly motivated by the prospect of ticket discounting:

Group 3: Students

W:	I think it depends on how much the price cuts are as well do you know what I mean. If they cut it by like 50p or something then you are going to be like, oh it is worth it just to stay in bed. If they were dramatically cut then it would catch your eye and you would think, well.

For some passengers, particularly those with the longest journeys, ticket prices couldn't be discounted enough to make them travel earlier.

Group 2: Commute greater than one hour to Waterloo

W:	No I would travel later. To travel earlier is really hard. I cannot get up before 6.00am. I cannot do it but I would travel later.

Group 4: Less affluent commuters

W:	With financial incentives, yes.

Group 5: More affluent commuters

M:	I stand by what I said before, I think that the one genuine incentive to encourage people to travel outside peak times is financial, reduce the cost for people travelling let's say before 8.00am and after 9.00am so that you spread the load so that those who can allow longer and more flexibility within their working day are more likely to take advantage of it. And yes, by all means, to get over flexibility do it through some form of mechanised ticket.

The discount required

For the discount to tempt the passengers it had to be substantial. Thirty percent was favoured by those in all but the more affluent group, they wanted twenty five percent.

Discounting was more likely to motivate earlier travel than later travel. Even those commuting to Waterloo in under an hour, who were most open to the idea of travelling later, did not believe that money off later tickets would persuade them to change.

The value of money vs. time

Not everyone was motivated by discounted tickets; some were more concerned about the value of time, though they were in the minority.

Group 1: Commute within one hour to Waterloo

M:	I don't think the emphasis should be on money because I don't think we all go to work to survive anyway. I think time is worth far more than money. So, even if I was offered more money in some cases I wouldn't take it. I'd rather have the time.
W:	Yes, me too. It doesn't really apply to me. I'm not going to get to work at 8.30am when the working day starts at 10.00am and I'm not going to run the risk of getting there late because I can't.

Translating the financial incentive into every day terms

The least affluent groups, which included the student group, favoured the idea that financial incentives should be brought to life by describing them in terms that related to everyday expenditure.

Although the less affluent group wanted a third off they felt it was more real to tell them how much they would be saving. For instance with a third off ticket prices this group would have saved about £40 a

month, enough for a gym membership. The student group suggested the saving should equate to the value of a packet of cigarettes.

Groups 3 & 4: Students and less affluent passengers

Facilitator:	OK, so if it saved you a couple of quid a day, a quid off each way?
W:	Yes, then it would just make you think, right. And I am a smoker as well so I would think, I can get myself a packet of fags in the morning
M:	That would be a really good tag, you save the money that is gym membership and then use the hour to go to the gym.

Money and flexibility

It was understandable and inevitable that passengers sought the biggest discounts on ticket prices to motivate them to change their travel times. However one of the more interesting themes that emerged from the discounting debate was the way that passengers wanted the discounts administered. Passengers wanted a system that would recognise when they were travelling and effectively reward or penalise them for it.

All groups eventually, spontaneously, started talking about an Oyster card system for the railways and the conversation turned into a discussion about the system rewarding good behaviour rather than being a simple, deep, discount.

Group 2: Commute within one hour to Waterloo

M:	Yes, like you build up a bank of credit from your behaviour, you don't have to necessarily stick to it.
M:	The Oyster cards are quite sophisticated now because they know when you start and finish so if you go before a certain time and you arrive at your destination a little bit later they can clock that and maybe give you, you pay less.

Group 3: Students

W:	And I would get really annoyed if it was them delaying the train and it coming in later so I have to pay for not getting a service, a clever card like an Oyster card might be better.

Reward not discount

Flexible ticketing or a 'mix and match' approach was suggested by passengers in all groups as it was seen as more of a reward. There was a feeling that with money off passengers would soon associate the ticket price with the discount price and become disillusioned again. In contrast a flexible ticket was seen to reward the user for travelling at a particular time and therefore was felt to be more special and useful. All passengers were adamant that they did not want to be penalised or punished in any way for travelling when they wanted to.

The most popular flexible ticket option was a system similar to the Oyster cards which would reward the user with credit if they travelled on certain trains. They would then be able to put the credit towards future travel or other retail options. This was suggested by a passenger in each group and always generated a real buzz of enthusiasm.

Groups: All

M:	Give me money back for the days I go in early
W:	Money back is better than reducing the price because then you don't get used to the reduced price and think of it as being the normal price

Group 4: Less affluent commuters

W:	And it would have to be a way of money that you didn't forget about. Because if you were consistently getting a third off, then it would just be that price and then paying the full price again would be like, my ticket has gone up. But if you got it back

Combination incentives

Many passengers had some flexibility around their working hours. To allow them to fully optimise that flexibility would require a travel permit that was adaptable to the occasions they could travel earlier or later.

It became clear that a wholesale switch in passenger behaviour was unlikely but that a combination of incentives could be employed to alter some passengers journey times some of the time.

The less affluent passengers were particularly keen on the two pronged approach.

Group 4: Less affluent commuters

M:	Comfort, but price is important too.
W:	Half or a third off the travel price, more seats and a choice of trains
M:	More seats on more trains and free water

Prompted response to incentives to travelling at off-peak times

Finance was deemed to be the most important incentive for all groups; it was also the only incentive that all groups would definitely change their routines for. Although among passengers less than an hour from Waterloo there were two passengers who felt their time was worth more than money and as such they were unwilling to change the time they travelled for a financial incentive.

Reliability was deemed to be one of the most important incentives for all but the less affluent groups and students. Students felt comfort was very important to them and this was probably because they always had very busy and uncomfortable journeys. The less affluent group and the more affluent group felt that the most motivating incentives would be a balance between value and comfort.

The female passengers commuting over an hour from Waterloo were also concerned about security probably because of their longer journeys and longer days.

Inclination to change travel timings to arrive at Waterloo before 8 a.m. or after 9 a.m.

Most passengers agreed that it was possible to persuade people to change their routines to arrive at Waterloo before 8 a.m. or after 9 a.m., but that it would be difficult.

When asked if they would be more likely to change to travel earlier or later the passengers' answers often changed, there was confusion and contradiction over which option they would take.

For instance all but one passenger in the student group declared they would only consider travelling later and not earlier. However when asked the same question in a different way (as part of the stimulus material on incentivising off-peak travel) a significant portion of them (nearly 30%) would travel either earlier or later.

In general during discussions all groups apart from students preferred the idea of starting earlier. However when asked the same question in relation to incentives and disincentives the responses often changed quite dramatically. For instance the least affluent group liked the idea of going in earlier but then they didn't in later discussions and then again when talking about disincentives they were equally split between those who would travel later and those who would travel in either earlier or later. When talking about incentives they were evenly split between those who would travel in earlier and those who would travel in later.

As motivating factors were suggested in the discussions passengers changed their minds.

This variable and changing quality of passengers' intentions highlights the need for a flexible ticket system.

Many of the passengers except those within the less and more affluent groups could not finish work earlier even if they started work earlier. However, those who worked flexitime in all groups preferred to go in earlier because they finished earlier.

SECTION 4 – THE COMMUTING EXPERIENCE

This purpose of this section is to put into context the task of persuading passenger who can be flexible in their travel times to switch either permanently to off-peak times or to travel at off-peak times more frequently. It also aims to assess the receptiveness of passengers to the concept of 'edge of morning peak travel' and hence the ease with which it may be possible to motivate them to change their behaviour.

Attitudes to rail travel in general

KEY FINDINGS

- Most passengers are still positively disposed to rail transport despite the discomfort. They are however embarrassed to admit it.
- The length of the journey did not seem to affect attitudes about the pleasure or otherwise of the commute
- A successful commute was seen by some passengers as a good/useful start to the day
- Passengers felt that off-peak rail journeys were more pleasant
- Some passengers did not mind peak travel
- Some passengers have a more adversarial attitude to the railways as a mode of transport
- The continued existence of First Class travel was a strong irritant amongst some passengers in all groups because it means that there are fewer seats on each train

A good/useful start to the day

The train is still seen as a good place to work or relax. All groups made spontaneous comments on this though the most affluent group discussed it for longest. Their's was more a world of Blackberry's and e-mails than any other group which is perhaps why they talked the most about it. Furthermore this group had a great deal of control over when they travelled and planned their journeys more than other groups.

Group 5: More affluent passengers

W:	I quite enjoy it for just catching up on news actually; I have a really good read of the paper. That's the only time of day I can get that time to do that.

The qualities of off-peak travel

Off-peak travel was perceived very positively by all groups. It was generally seen as easier and had a beneficial effect on the passenger's day. However, these views were quite 'idealised' and it is worth bearing in mind that some passengers in all groups didn't mind peak travel.

Groups all: Collective adjectives to describe off-peak travel

- Amusing
- Better
- Calm
- Comfort
- Easier
- Easier to run for the train
- Empty
- Friendly
- Happy travellers
- Increased reliability
- Left alone
- Leisure and not work
- Less people
- Less stressful
- "Like a dream"
- Peace
- Quiet
- Relaxed
- Seats
- Spacious
- Treat

The words most frequently used in relation to off-peak travel, across all groups were 'Seats', 'Relaxed', 'Easier', 'Comfort', and 'Calm'. Although this was not quantitative research it is interesting that the softer, more emotional qualities to describe off-peak travel far outweighed the harder functional quality of 'Seats' as top of mind amongst passengers. This should be considered in the context of the tone and content of future rail industry communications.

It should also be noted that nobody in any group associated off-peak travel, at this point, with cost savings.

Attitudes to peak travel differed greatly. Cost was much more relevant to the experience.

Groups all: Collective adjectives to describe peak travel

- People come across as very rude and selfish at peak times
- Especially fighting for seats, you know, they won't sit in the middle seat they want to sit on their own and I find it really makes you angry
- Just being so crowded, everyone is pushing you nudging you, it is just really stressful and by the time you get to where you are going you are a bit irate you know…
- People do look so miserable as well. I think it is quite depressing
- Everyone is so aggressive
- It is amazing the amount of people
- I can't believe how expensive
- Yes it is expensive as well, they have hiked the prices up haven't they.
- Terrible
- Nightmare
- Stressful
- Hectic
- Disaster, packed
- Hot.
- Lack of ventilation
- Lack of communication
- No seats
- Unfair
- Out of my control

When asked to describe an ideal journey all groups described it as comfortable and reliable.

Groups: All

W:	You should not really notice it. You should get from A to B with no distractions
M:	Your utopian travel is you walk into the station and the train's pulling in just as you arrive and you get straight onto the first carriage, there's a seat, you haven't got anybody smelly or dirty anywhere near you you've got room to read the paper or read your book, the train whistles through stopping where it's meant to stop and getting into Waterloo on time and Bob's you uncle, lovely, but it doesn't work like that in peak time

Interestingly some passengers in all groups except those living within an hours commute to Waterloo all made positive remarks about Peak travel, with the student group describing it as essential.

This is probably because peak travel is seen as something some passengers have to do so they adjust to and expect and tolerate the negative aspects of it. This highlights the strength of the habit forming nature of commuting.

Groups: All

M:	I don't think I have a problem with it [peak travel], I'm probably in the minority because everyone hates public transport

Adversarial attitude to rail travel

In the context of communicating with travellers and trying to persuade them to change their travel times not all passengers were positively disposed to the rail industry.

Group 1: Commute within one hour to Waterloo

M:	I see it as like a balance, I always think if I get in earlier with a little bit more time in bed, for example, I think "I've won today"
M:	… for me the relationship I have with public transport's almost like a power thing, I want to feel like I'm in power, I don't want to be dictated to when I should be travelling by them. It's almost like "I will do the journey I want to do regardless"

Furthermore there was some resentment that the rail industry might actually be attempting to persuade passengers to travel at different times. The feeling was very much, 'why should we help you to sort out your problems? You don't do anything to help us'.

Group 1: Commute within one hour to Waterloo

M:	They advertise constantly about getting people on the trains and not using their cars and now they are trying to say about getting in on peak time, which is the time that everyone has really got to get to work
W:	It is a bit harsh saying if you want a seat get up out of bed earlier. I have paid so much money I want a train service

However the passengers expressing these views were in a minority and most passengers were much more positive. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that passengers will be receptive to the suggestion that they switch to off-peak travel.

'First Class frustration'

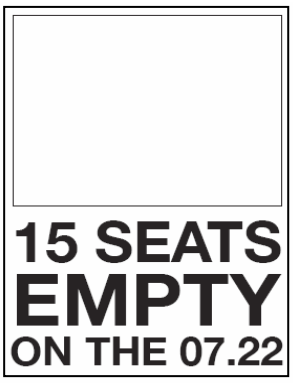
The one major irritant that crossed all passenger groups was caused by the continued existence of First Class carriages. Most groups mentioned it spontaneously as a great source of frustration. In the context of the proposed poster campaign that relies on the message that there are empty seats on a different train it is worth bearing this in mind. Whilst First Class seats go unoccupied as regular passengers have to stand on the train they prefer to travel on (not one earlier or later to suit the rail industry), the message that there are seats on another train may prove to be an even greater source of irritation rather than an encouragement to switch trains. Rule breaking passengers who don't have a ticket for First Class but use the facility amplify this resentment.

Group 5: More affluent passengers

M:	If I can't get a seat and I'm on a crowded train that really, really bugs me, and the first class compartment's can really bug me.

SECTION 5 – OBSERVATIONS ON THE 'POSTER'

The purpose of this section is to review the effectiveness of a proposed poster designed to persuade passengers, who can be flexible in their travel times to switch either permanently to off-peak times or to do so more frequently. The design of the test poster is shown below:



KEY FINDINGS

- The purpose of the poster was understood
- Poster was greeted with a mix of cynicism and amusement
- The poster would raise awareness but not motivate change
- Most groups did not find the poster relevant to their own circumstances

Understanding

The passengers in all groups instantly understood what the poster was telling them and most thought that it was stating the obvious that an earlier train would have more free seats. However it received mixed reactions. Initially it was greeted with amusement, especially by students and the less affluent. However those passengers commuting to Waterloo in under one hour displayed cynicism and disbelief

Review of effectiveness

One passenger, in the less affluent group, found the poster effective. She said she would be motivated to switch train times, especially if she saw the poster on a crowded train when she was feeling most uncomfortable.

However there was an overwhelming feeling that although the poster would raise awareness about seats on earlier trains it would not work. Passengers gave several reasons why they felt it would not work:

1. Many felt that it would just shift the problem to an earlier train

2. Many felt that it was not relevant to them. This was particularly common among passengers making shorter, busier journeys. They felt it would make little difference to them.
3. Many felt that they wouldn't know if there actually were empty seats until you they tried the train, and there may well not be.
4. 15 seats were not felt to be enough. It was a believable number but not a tempting number.
5. Less affluent passengers and those commuting for over an hour into Waterloo took issue over the timing of the train. It was either too early for them for those travelling longer distances was too late!
6. Some felt it lacked detail such as departure and destination information

Common suggestions for improvement

The most common suggestions to improve the poster were:

- Comfort should be stressed
- That there should be many more than 15 empty seats mentioned
- There should be no commitment to a specific number because people won't believe it
- Discounts should be mentioned
- Combinations of discounts and many more seats should be mentioned

See Appendix 5 for a complete range of passenger poster re-designs.

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