



Passenger requirements during resignalling disruption

Report of research findings

June 2007



Passenger Focus is the independent national rail consumer watchdog. It is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Transport.

Our mission is to get the best deal for Britain's rail passengers. We have two main aims: to influence both long and short term decisions and issues that affect passengers; and to help passengers through advice, advocacy and empowerment.

With a strong emphasis on evidence-based campaigning and research, we ensure that we know what is happening on the ground. We use our knowledge to influence decisions on behalf of rail passengers and we work with the rail industry, other passenger groups and Government to secure journey improvements.

Our vision is to ensure that the rail industry and Government are always

'putting rail passengers first'

This will be achieved through our mission of

'getting the best deal for passengers'

Forward

This publication gives the findings of research commissioned by Passenger Focus amongst passengers who use the Colchester to Clacton-on-Sea and Walton-on-the-Naze line. The research was designed to inform decisions by Network Rail and 'one' railway about passengers' needs while signalling is being renewed on these routes between now and Spring 2009. It has been funded jointly between Passenger Focus, 'one' railway and Network Rail – with the latter contributing the lion's share. Passenger Focus is particularly encouraged that Network Rail recognised the need to make sure passengers' views are taken into account as part of a major engineering project.

The key findings from this work were that:

- Communications with passengers is key. Therefore a comprehensive, "unmissable" multi-media campaign is required to ensure that all the different groups of passengers (e.g. daily London commuters, local commuters, leisure travellers) are aware of the work and how it will affect them.
- Communications should focus on the future benefits of the work and allay concerns of passengers with the greatest dependency on the service. This should be done by making clear that most work will be conducted at weekends and that a replacement service will be provided whenever there is midweek disruption
- Replacement bus Plan 1 should be implemented: passengers felt it was far superior to Plan 2
- Network Rail must work very hard to ensure that there are no Monday morning engineering overruns – this was a big fear amongst daily London commuters
- There must be robust contingency arrangements in place to get passengers to work if there are over-run problems on Mondays
- The needs of passengers making journeys between intermediate stations, particularly in relation to Saturday commuting for work, must not be overlooked.

Passenger Focus will now work closely with the rail industry to ensure that the key messages emerging from this research are taken into account in the detailed planning stages for this project.

Guy Dangerfield

Passenger Focus

June 2007

Passenger requirements during train
service disruption while the Colchester
to Clacton/Walton-on-Naze railway is
resignalled

Research Report

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Management Summary

- Passenger Focus need to understand passenger requirements during planned engineering work on the Colchester to Clacton/Walton-on-Naze routes, which will undergo resignalling starting in 2007 and completing in summer 2009.
- **6 Group discussions** (6-8 respondents per 90 minute session) were conducted among rail users (including London Commuters, Local Commuters and Weekend/Weekday Leisure Users. The research was conducted in February 2007.
- Overall, this research has confirmed that the needs and requirements of the user groups that will be affected by the engineering works are relatively straightforward and should not prove to be difficult to meet.
- However, a consistent and important finding of this work was that the effectiveness of the information campaign that will be required to keep passengers up to date is likely to be almost as important as the efficiency of the bus replacement service that will be provided for the duration of the engineering works.
- Those who are the heaviest users of the service and most dependent on it for the purposes of commuting are likely to be least affected by the proposals for the work to be conducted at weekends only. Those who are most likely to be directly affected tend to have the greatest degree of flexibility but may also have fewest convenient alternatives available to them.
- This project has indicated that although many passengers are able to appreciate that the planned investment on the route is likely to deliver long-term benefits for them as users of the rail service, these tend to be intangible and difficult to appreciate in the immediate effect. We have therefore hypothesised that it is desirable to inform those who will be affected about the nature of the work but that it is not necessary to provide specific details relating to costs.
- We suggest that many users accept and tolerate disruption to services for essential maintenance work as an inevitable consequence of being reliant on the rail network. On this occasion, passenger priorities amount to little more than a need for a reliable replacement service to be provided.
- The concerns of almost all passengers represented in our sample were allayed on exposure to the two bus replacement plans that were presented for research. There was a strong preference expressed for Plan 1, which was widely felt to meet expectations to the extent that it would have the desirable effect of keeping disruption caused to a minimum.

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- We further hypothesise from this research that the specific details and logistics of the replacement service are likely to be almost inconsequential to the majority as long as it is well organised and managed and is able to cope adequately with the demand that will exist for it.
- A key finding of this work relates to the provision that will be made for commuters for the duration of the Clacton blockade, especially during peak hours. It will be essential to ensure that learnings from the weekend replacement service are applied in order to minimise the disruption and inconvenience for dependent users.
- It is perhaps worth noting that a number of respondents mentioned that they felt reassured by the fact that the research exercise had been commissioned well in advance of the work. In our view, most appreciated the fact that they were being consulted as users of the service and welcomed the opportunity to express their views and opinions on a range of issues that will affect them directly.

In summary, the research has indicated that passenger needs during the period of the engineering work are generally reasonable and realistic and can be adequately met by guaranteeing an efficient and reliable replacement service and keeping passengers informed via an effective communications campaign. Our recommendations to Network Rail and 'one' railway are therefore as follows:

- **Consider issuing a local press release to provide advanced notice of the works in a managed and controlled manner**
- **Communications should focus on the future benefits of the work rather than the specific reasons for it or the cost of it**
- **Allay concerns of the most dependent users by communicating that the work will be conducted at weekends only and that a replacement service will be provided**
- **Implement replacement Plan 1**
- **Have a contingency in place to cope with over-running works on Monday mornings**
- **Ensure the communications campaign is comprehensive, integrated across multi-media, ongoing and unmissable for all user groups**

1. Research Context and Objectives

Passenger Focus commissioned this research project to look at passenger needs during planned engineering work on the Colchester to Clacton/Walton-on-Naze route. The research approach required was qualitative, using focus groups, to understand the needs of the passengers travelling on the routes, which will undergo resignalling which starts from 2007 and completes in summer 2009.

This research was managed by Passenger Focus, working closely with Network Rail and 'one' railway in a jointly funded project. The Passenger Focus mission is to get the best deal for rail passengers and to seek to secure measurable improvements in the quality of rail services in Great Britain. Network Rail owns, operates, maintains and renews Britain's track, signalling systems, bridges, tunnels, level crossings, viaducts and 17 key stations. 'one', a National Express Group train company, operates the Greater Anglia passenger franchise which includes the Colchester to Clacton/Walton-on-Naze route.

The overall objective of the research was to understand passenger requirements in order to ensure that arrangements for passengers during the planned engineering work meet their needs to the greatest degree possible.

The specific objectives were:

- To understand what passengers' priorities are during the planned engineering works
- To understand the needs/priorities of the different passenger categories in the run up to the planned work taking place
- To understand the requirements/alternative solutions that needs to be put in place to meet the requirements of the different categories of passenger.

2. Sample & Methodology

The most effective means of meeting the objectives of the research was to run focus groups covering three main categories of passenger: London Commuters; Local Commuters (i.e. commuting other than to Greater London) and Leisure Travellers (i.e. any travel that is neither commuting to work/education nor business travel for which the employer is paying).

In Order to canvass a broad and representative range of passenger opinion from the three main passenger categories who travel to or from Clacton/Walton-on-Naze to Colchester or beyond, six focus group sessions were organised as follows:

1. Clacton London Commuters.

Passengers who commute regularly from Clacton to Greater London primarily using weekday (i.e. Mondays to Fridays) services.

2. Walton London Commuters.

Passengers who commute regularly from Walton, Frinton or Thorpe-le-Soken stations to Greater London primarily using weekday (i.e. Mondays to Fridays) services.

3. Clacton Local Commuters.

Passengers who commute regularly from Clacton to anywhere other than Greater London or commute to Clacton from anywhere other than Greater London. Passengers were primarily using weekday (i.e. Mondays to Fridays) services.

4. Walton Local Commuters.

Passengers who commute regularly from Walton, Frinton or Thorpe-le-Soken stations to anywhere other than Greater London or commute to Walton, Frinton or Thorpe-le-Soken stations from anywhere other than Greater London. Passengers were primarily using weekday (i.e. Mondays to Fridays) services.

5. Weekend Leisure Users

This was a mix of passengers who travel from or to Clacton, Walton, Frinton or Thorpe-le-Soken stations and those who travel from or to intermediate stations between Thorpe-le-Soken and Colchester, namely Weeley, Great Bentley, Arlesford, Wivenhoe or Hythe. There was also a mix of those travelling wholly within the Colchester to Clacton/Walton route and those who were travelling to or from further a field. Passengers were primarily using weekend services and any who used the train less frequently than once every two months were excluded.

6. Weekday Leisure Users

These were passengers who travel from or to Clacton. There was a mix of those travelling wholly within the Colchester to Clacton/Walton route and those who were travelling to or from further a field. Passengers were primarily using weekday (i.e. Mondays to Fridays) services and those who used the train less frequently than once every two months were excluded.

3. Main Findings

3.1 User Category Profiles

London Commuters

This particular group had been included in the sample on the basis of being the heaviest users of the affected line. Both groups represented (travelling from Clacton or Walton-On-Naze) were commuting to and from London Liverpool Street on Monday to Friday every week and were the most homogeneous of the three user categories in terms of their service usage patterns. Although many claimed to have little appetite or need to travel by train at the weekend, some were taking advantage of their season tickets to get 'free' leisure usage of the service, predominantly for return journeys to Colchester or London.

London commuters acknowledged that they were at the mercy of the service operating on their route due to the fact that the majority of respondents had little or no flexibility in their working arrangements. This resulted in an extremely high overall level of dependency on the service provision due to the fact that most acknowledged that they have no realistic alternative available for the purposes of travelling between home and work on a daily basis. It was unsurprising therefore that they were the most appreciative of the fact that the current service was felt to be generally reliable to the extent that overall experiences reported tended to be largely positive.

"When it's good it's very good but when it's bad it's absolutely terrible"
[Clacton London Commuter]

*"In the morning and most of the evenings it runs pretty much on time.
When the wind was blowing the other day I got stuck in Thorpe"*
[Walton London Commuter]

*"In terms of the delays there is one delay every fortnight and it is not
something that you can really be bothered about"*
[Walton London Commuter]

Indeed the most common frustration expressed among the commuter groups related to current service frequency rather than reliability, especially with regard to the evening return from Liverpool Street, which is a particular problem for those who live in Walton.

“Since I have been in London I socialise a lot more in London. But the frustrating thing is that to catch the late train you have to go at quarter past ten”

[Clacton London Commuter]

Local Commuters

The majority of those recruited as Local Commuters were using the train to travel to and from work five times per week although some were working part-time or had flexible working arrangements. Almost all were commuting to Colchester although three respondents travelled to different destinations, which were Chelmsford, Hythe and Goodmayes. Generally, this user group felt that they had more alternatives available to them than the London Commuters due to the length of their journeys, although interestingly they tended to be less tolerant of the occasional problems with the service. A couple of respondents who travelled from Frinton were most critical of the service in this respect and said that their trains were often late or delayed or even cancelled. Once again however, the main problem that was consistently identified by these groups related to service frequency rather than reliability, especially when returning from London at the end of a night out after work. Since many had a more negative perception of the train service than the London Commuters, the majority of Local Commuters claimed to avoid using trains at weekends

“On the whole it is quite a good service”

“It’s brilliant”

“When it’s running properly it’s the business, but when it goes wrong it tends to get worse as the week goes on”

[Clacton Local Commuter]

“For me personally, because of the time of day that I am travelling there are other services, I can be more flexible and have the option to use an earlier train”

[Clacton Local Commuter]

“When it works the service in the morning especially to Chelmsford and into London is really good, on the whole. In the year that I have been travelling I think I have had to stop once in Colchester and once in Hatfield Peverel in the mornings”

[Clacton Local Commuter]

*“Often the one that goes from Walton to Thorpe is cancelled and when
it’s cold or raining”*

[Walton Local Commuter]

*“At least once a week isn’t it, something like that when it’s cancelled.
Either delayed, cancelled or a bus service or something”*

[Walton Local Commuter]

“The last thing I want to do at the weekend is to rely on the train”

[Walton Local Commuter]

Leisure Users

As determined from the recruitment criteria, these respondents had more variable and less frequent usage patterns and destinations travelled to than the Commuter groups. Many however were most often using the train to travel to Colchester or London for leisure purposes as well as to a wide range of local and other destinations such as Ipswich, Ely and Cambridge. These users generally reported more consistently positive views and experiences of the train service since occasional problems were regarded as little more than minor inconveniences for them. The Weekend Users in this sample were much more dependent on the service than the Weekday Users since the group happened to include a high proportion of non-drivers who claimed to have no easy or natural alternative available to them. Importantly however, these users also tended to have a greater degree of flexibility than Commuters since many of the journeys they were making were non-essential or at least discretionary. They acknowledged that in the event of disruption to any given service they would often have the option of travelling later or of not making the journey at all on that day. On the basis of findings from these groups therefore, it would appear that those who are most likely to be most directly affected by the engineering work are likely to have the greatest flexibility but may also have access to the fewest convenient alternatives.

“I find it’s a good service. Clean and tidy. No complaints at all”

[Weekday Leisure User]

“There is a bus service but I’ve never tried it but I would if I had to”

[Weekday Leisure User]

3.2 Engineering Works

Awareness And First Reactions

There was very little awareness and certainly no accurate awareness of the proposed work from any of the groups. There were one or two individuals among the London Commuter Groups who had a vague recollection of information that they thought had appeared in the local press and therefore felt that they had an idea that some engineering work on the line was being planned.

“I think if it has been in the paper it has probably gone all the way round the trains already and people are expecting it. If it hadn’t been in the paper it would probably have been a shock but it has been”
[Clacton London Commuter]

Not surprisingly the reactions across the sample tended to differ. This variation broadly split by user group although this was not totally consistent. Generally it was the London Commuters who expressed the highest levels of initial concern on the subject of the engineering works. These two groups felt that a very negative impact on their daily commuting life would be inevitable due to the anticipated disruption to their journeys, often based on past awareness and experiences of delays resulting from engineering works. This underlying concern led many to express open concerns during the group discussions of how they would cope with their journeys to and from work during this period.

Local Commuters exhibited quite strong initial resistance, manifest via negative knee-jerk responses to the news. Interestingly, they often tended to be more critical than the London Commuters and adopted a common attitude of expecting the worst rather than hoping for the best.

The Leisure Users were initially most receptive to the news. They were more understanding of the need for this type of work than other user groups since they are not under the same pressures as commuters and can be more flexible in terms of their needs and usage. Consequently they tended to think of others before themselves and expressed concern for commuters and how the engineering works would impact on their lives and journeys.

“It would be a nuisance more than anything else because sometimes although we’ve got a car, we like to go to Ipswich on a Saturday on a train because it saves all the hassle of driving so we wouldn’t be able to and 2 years is a long time not to”
[Weekday Leisure User]

"I think people who use it at Bank Holidays and weekends are more flexible because it is not a work thing. It is the commuters who would suffer if it was in the week"
[Weekend Leisure User]

"I think people who use it at Bank Holidays and weekends are more flexible because it is not a work thing. It is the commuters who would suffer if it was in the week"
[Weekend Leisure User]

"I don't have to use it. I use it for leisure. If the train doesn't run that day then fine I won't go or I will drive. I will find other ways to get there, I am not going to lose money if I don't get to London"
[Weekend Leisure User]

"Well providing that they communicate it correctly I can't see it really affecting the leisure client that much providing that they provide some kind of alternative or replacement service"
[Weekend Leisure User]

"It is probably going to affect people more who work in the city at weekends" It is probably only a small minority but it will affect them"
[Weekend Leisure User]

Details Of Proposed Works

Details of the proposed engineering works were introduced to each of the groups in the following consistent format:

- **Network Rail is planning to invest £78m to replace a railway signalling system that is more than forty years old.**
- **The total project investment including track renewals is £102m**
- **The scheme will provide a modern signalling system, which will result in a more reliable service to passengers.**

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Reactions to the details of the proposed work were then invited from each group. The majority of respondents anticipated that the work would be likely to provide long- term benefits for themselves as rail users, even if this was often difficult to appreciate in the immediate term. However, exposure to the information elicited a very interesting initial response in relation to the level of investment in the project. The reaction was often quite critical in the context of what was perceived to be a very high spend for such a relatively small section of the rail network.

“Well modernisation is good but the line between Clacton and Colchester is just one way and one the other. It can’t be that complicated to do the signalling system for that”
[Walton London Commuter]

There were nevertheless a number of highly positive responses from the groups including an appreciation of the fact that the high level of spend is seen as putting the customer’s money back into the railway to modernise the local network. The works were also welcomed as pre-emptive action intended to minimise the possibility of delays and disruption in the future. Some (London Commuters especially) hoped that a consequence of the replacement and modernisation programme would be to reduce journey times while ensuring at the same time that the service reliability and efficiency will improve.

“Well I think it is going to be positive if we go back to our old running time of 1 hour and 15 minutes. The thing is if it delivers improvements”
[Clacton London Commuter]

“But it’s whether that’s going to make a massive difference to the current state of the service now, if that’s a preventative measure for future problems that they can foresee happening. Do they think that the signal service is so bad that if they don’t do something about it now, it’s going to cause problems or they recognise that there are significant problems that need to be dealt with”
[Walton Local Commuter]

“Will it make it a quicker journey, are we going to get quicker journeys because it’s going to be replaced?”
“More reliable?”
[Weekday Leisure Users]

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A number of Local Commuters and Leisure Users however expressed concerns over the need to spend so much time and money on the proposed works. They felt that whenever there were problems on this particular stretch of line it was rarely to do with signals but with something else. They therefore could not see the need for such a high level of investment on what was often perceived to be a non-existent problem for them as users.

“The amount of times you hear ‘this train has been cancelled due to’, it’s not that often signals. It’s usually something else. But usually a train’s broken down on the track between Kirby and Frinton so nothing can get past or something like that, isn’t it? It’s not just the signals that need sorting out”

[Walton Local Commuter]

“I wasn’t aware it was a problem because every time we’re delayed by signalling problems, it’s always near London, it’s not locally is it? I haven’t been aware of it being a problem round here”

[Weekday Leisure User]

“I would sooner see it invested in longer trains so that people who are paying for season tickets have all got a seat and more frequent trains, a better weekend service. As far as I can see the signalling and everything else is OK. The problem is always at Witham or Chelmsford not the Thorpe to Colchester run. And you ask any commuter and they will say the same thing”

[Weekend Leisure User]

“Unless you can give us reasons why there are problems there because I am a regular reader of the Gazette and I haven’t heard anything unless you know different and say that yes the signals keep breaking down between Wivenhoe and Colchester or Thorpe and Great Bentley or whatever but I haven’t heard of anything”

[Weekend Leisure User]

“There has been no disasters have there? There have been no crashes. It’s an awful lot of money to spend on something that I don’t think is necessary when all those commuters have to pay all that money and they have to stand from Thorpe to Liverpool Street”

[Weekend Leisure User]

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A number of respondents were therefore able to identify a variety of higher immediate priority areas that they felt would more readily justify this level of expenditure such as improving the standard of the stations and the rolling stock or improving the service frequency. Some expressed concerns that the net result of spending such a large sum of money would be that fares would increase and that there would be no appreciable improvement in the service, which would then be perceived as a waste of money after the event.

There was also some concern voiced that the actual spend would be considerably higher than the amount suggested as this type of work is renowned for not being completed within the intended budget. A widely held view was that fares should actually be reduced or at least frozen during the works period to compensate users for the inconvenience caused to them.

The interesting and consistent reactions to the expenditure across the sample suggests that the communication of the actual level of spend on the project will need to be considered to allay concerns and minimise the perception of wastage and minimal tangible benefit to user groups.

Implications By User Group

There was a widespread acceptance among all of the groups that this and indeed any engineering works are part and parcel of being reliant on the rail network. Many of the respondents represented in this project were more concerned about how the engineering work would affect others rather than themselves especially those who were most dependent and paid significant amounts for annual passes. The majority felt that they would come to terms with any possible disruption quite quickly.

“Because it is a railway, it is a high maintenance infrastructure and historically engineering works go on in the early hours of the morning and heavy engineering goes on at the weekend. It is part and parcel of what you buy into when you use the railway”

[Clacton London Commuter]

“I think people just expect that things have got to be done”

[Clacton London Commuter]

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London Commuters were most anxious about the scale of the work to be conducted and the amount of time required to complete a project of this magnitude. They were therefore delighted and relieved to learn that the intention was to conduct the work at weekends only as they unanimously felt that this would minimise the impact of the work on them and their journeys. The common concern expressed among this user group was the fear that there would be frequent occasions when the weekend work would over-run which would have serious implications for Monday morning services.

“As long as the engineering works do not interfere with the weekday service then that is fine”

[Walton London Commuter]

“After the July bombings happened last year, when they were re-doing the Piccadilly line it was supposed to be only done during weekends and Bank Holidays but then so often it would spill over to weekdays and that did become a nightmare to the point that I was taking a much longer route to get to Covent Garden”

[Walton London Commuter]

“I would be annoyed (if work over-ran). I could lose a morning's work. Now if that did carry on like that I would be very annoyed”

“How would you know that? You would only know that once you got to the station on Monday morning”

“Well if that was the case that would be very annoying, if you phone in every Monday and say you can't come in today to your boss. You would be sacked”

[Walton London Commuters]

“You've picked us because we commute to London during the week I am sure that there are lots of people who work in retail in Colchester who work every Saturday and Sunday and for them it's the same commute. They have got to get to work for 9.00am and that is going to hit them a lot more than it is us”

[Walton London Commuter]

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Local Commuters who tended to be more sceptical about the need for the work to be conducted in the first instance were unable to understand why it would take so long to be completed. Some claimed that it would be less disruptive if the work were carried out every night rather than at weekends only (although this was likely to have been a reflexive rather than a considered response). Some started to consider the likely problems that would result from such an extensive schedule of work and many also expressed concern for weekend users who would be more directly affected than themselves.

“Usually they do Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holidays and that will affect my journey on a Monday because all the delays happen because from Sunday night. If I’m ever going to be late it will be a Monday morning and I have to get a later bus from Chelmsford and then I will be late for work.

[Clacton Local Commuter]

“Past experience tells me that when you have engineering work it has shot over on Monday morning and I have been a victim of disruption when I have been living on the main line because I used to live in Witham and commute into London for 10 years so I am well experienced. This sort of thing has a habit of hitting you in the face on a Monday morning”

[Clacton Local Commuter]

“I just think that as a commuter that if that goes on to Monday morning it is going to make me so moody getting on a train. There is no other way I can travel so I am going to have to accept it. As a commuter I have to accept it, we all do”

[Clacton Local Commuter]

Leisure Users who tended to have less exposure to and experience of the effects of engineering work expected that the proposed project on their line would cause chaos in the short term. The weekday users recognised that they were unlikely to be affected but expressed concern for weekend users. Weekend users understood and accepted the rationale for planning to conduct the work at weekends only and accepted that they would need to think ahead and plan journeys more carefully during the period that services would be disrupted. Many acknowledged that their usage of the service was discretionary and consequently more flexible than commuters and that they expected that they would get used to the inevitable changes over time.

"It's going to cause chaos for many, many people because they'll not have the train service. There are a lot of people that won't catch a bus"
[Weekday Leisure User]

"Well if it was me, personally me, it probably wouldn't worry me because like I say I can get an alternative... but that's me but I would think for other people"
[Weekday Leisure User]

"It's sod's law. At the moment I can pick and choose if I go by train or not to London. You wait and see, as soon as that closes down for a week or a month or something, I'll get a job in London"
[Weekday Leisure User]

"It definitely would affect me, definitely in a big way because I hate catching buses anyway but if it did happen then I'd probably say (to my family) I won't come on weekends, I'll come during the week"
[Weekday Leisure User]

"It is going to be a bit inconvenient. I mean inconvenience that I will put up with"
[Weekend Leisure User]

Passenger Needs And Concerns

A key requirement that was consistent across all user groups was the need for information relating to the engineering works and the impact that this would have on services.

In particular, respondents wanted to be given sufficient notice in advance of the work for them to be able to make alternative travel arrangements if necessary. In this respect there was a consistent request for a comprehensive campaign of communications designed to keep passengers up to date with progress and any new developments and implications for rail users. In addition, many felt that a critical requirement would be for staff at stations and on trains to be fully aware of plans in order that they could act as an additional information source for passengers.

"Make sure that the staff are available. Because on a number of occasions when I have been delayed it seems that all of a sudden the staff disappear"
[Clacton London Commuter]

“One of the problems that I have with the national rail service is the lack of proper communications. When there was the wind problem last Thursday or the Thursday before that it was a case of right national rail problem shut everything down, what is the problem? We don’t know. Any coaches? We don’t know. It is that sort of lack of communication that really does get frustrating”
[Walton London Commuter]

“I think that it is a matter of consistency at the end of the day. A consistent level of service and customers know what to expect over the period of time that these works are taking place”

“And obviously they need more manpower. They need to sort out communications systems the best way they can. We are season ticket holders; we need to be told before any one else. If there are problems on a Sunday I would like to be told on the Sunday not on the Monday because I have walked to the station it has taking me 20 minutes and if the train is delayed 20 minutes I could have stayed at home for that 20 minutes.

[Clacton Local Commuters]

London Commuters and others who had highest levels of dependency on the route wondered whether they would be eligible for any financial compensation due to the inconvenience suffered during the period of disruption and hoped at least for some form of token goodwill gesture to be provided by One Railway. Of much greater concern to the majority however was the need at this stage to be reassured that the inconvenience suffered as a result of the work would be kept to an absolute minimum.

“As a goodwill gesture to us the rail company should consider the option of a fare freeze to win the customers over”

[Clacton Local Commuter]

The main concerns that were expressed on exposure to news about the engineering work generally related to needs during this period of time being unmet and can be summarised as follows:

- Passengers being kept in the dark about what is happening due to insufficient information being available in a timely enough manner
- The planned schedule for the work will not be adhered to and that there will be frequent over-runs that will cause even more disruption and inconvenience to passengers

“That’s the problem with these big projects isn’t it they say we will have it at phase one and that’s going to be at such and such a time and it isn’t. And then they say well we are actually never going to finish it”
“Yeah and then the budget figure goes up and up and up. And then the fares go up”

[Clacton Local Commuters]

“Is it going to cause the price of tickets to go up?”
“£102 million for such a short stretch of track, I want to know where that money is going”

[Clacton Local Commuters]

“My first reaction is that money is going to be on my ticket, that £78 million. My ticket will go up in the summer then if they over-run it will go up at Christmas, then again early next year”

[Clacton Local Commuter]

- Commuters were worried that in the event of (inevitable and foreseeable) over-runs, there would be no contingency in place for Monday mornings. Some felt that this should be a compulsory part of the planning process due to the severity of the implications of over-runs for London Commuters especially.
- In the context of the recent annual fare increase (at the time the research was conducted), some felt it would be unfair to be penalised additionally in 2008 and 2009 by price increases that coincided with ongoing disruption to services

“One thing that I think everyone will agree with me about is that during the two year period and during the period of the works, no rises in the prices”

“Prices regardless of inflation should not be touched”

“Prices should remain the same for two years”

“They have put it up twice the inflation rate”

[Walton London Commuters]

- Due to the geographical ‘remoteness’ of the area that is not well served by an infrastructure of alternative methods of public transport, those living in Clacton and Walton especially were more concerned than usual about the possibility of being stranded and unable to get to their intended destination, especially late at night.

- In the spirit of thinking how others would be affected by the work that was a consistent feature of this project, many were concerned about the potential impact of weekend closures on tourism given the importance of this industry for seaside communities in this part of the country

*“Why start in the summer when the tourists are coming and more people are going to use it on a Saturday, Sunday or Bank Holiday?”
[Clacton Local Commuter]*

*“When are they thinking of doing it, what time of the year? For instance, if you decided to do it in the summertime which I suppose would be best time for the railways to do it, it’s going to affect the tourist industry isn’t it?”
[Weekday Leisure User]*

Overall, in terms of passenger needs and priorities during the period of the engineering works, the theme that emerged as the consistent priority for all user groups was the need for reassurance that a reliable replacement service would be available as a mandatory requirement for the duration.

3.3 Replacement Service

Key Criteria

On the basis of the evidence available from this project, it would appear that passenger expectations of the replacement service are reasonable and realistic and are based on recent precedents.

*“When they did the Ipswich tunnel work it was fine. The coaches were organised properly and they did more work than they intended to”
[Clacton London Commuter]*

*“When a bridge was struck at Weeley, coaches went from Colchester to Clacton and it worked well but there have been other occasions when no-one takes charge”
[Clacton London Commuter]*

*“A good replacement service is more important to me than whether I will get compensation”
[Walton London Commuter]*

The findings from the research also indicate that there is a consistent set of requirements that passengers have of the replacement service that is provided that should not be difficult to meet with careful thought and planning. The key criteria identified by respondents in this respect fall into the following four broad categories:

1. Organisation

The most important element of the organisational aspect of the replacement service was universally felt to be to ensure that sufficient time was allowed for it to be adequately planned in advance of the work starting. Beyond this, the majority felt that the task should not prove to be too difficult given that the work would be confined to a straightforward 'up and down' section of track within a relatively small geographic area. Most therefore considered that all that was required was the application of common sense from someone appointed to be responsible for the replacement service who would manage it efficiently with the needs of all user groups in mind.

"They could do what they did in Manningtree. When they mended the tunnel at Ipswich, for about 6 months they had a bus from Manningtree to Ipswich and it was fantastically well organised wasn't it?"

"Yes. It was all coaches as well"

"Yes, brilliant. It was fantastic"

"It's got to be well organised"

[Weekday Leisure Users]

2. Flexibility

The flexibility of the replacement service emerged as a critical consideration among user groups who expressed concern that it would need to be sympathetic to their circumstances. In this respect, the primary requirement appears to be for the buses to be coordinated with current connections and must especially be planned to link with train services from Colchester. Some also requested that in the event of late-running replacement services, connections at Colchester would be held to avoid further penalising those who are inconvenienced by the disruption to the service.

“If you get kicked off the train you want to know that you are not going to be standing around waiting for a bus, they just need to be coordinated don’t they?”

[Walton London Commuter]

“Obviously the bus services that are put into place need to arrive at Colchester North to coincide with the train that is leaving Colchester not arrive after the train has left and we have to wait 20 minutes”

[Clacton Local Commuter]

I think that the point we are making is to make sure that the buses coincide with the train arrivals and departures. We don’t want a situation where the bus arrives and the train left a few minutes earlier”

“It has to be efficient”

“It’s not rocket science is it? If it’s going to take you half an hour on the train, it will take you an hour on the bus”

[Clacton Local Commuters]

“I am accepting that I am going to have to be flexible about the way I plan my journeys at the weekends, but it works two ways; I would need onward connections from Colchester and I don’t want to be in a situation where the bus from Clacton has missed the connection further southwards at Colchester. That is the number one issue for me

because of past experience“

[Clacton Local Commuter]

3. Frequency

The most important requirement relating to the frequency of the replacement service is for it to be able to comfortably match the demand that exists for it and to reflect passenger volumes that currently use the weekend train services that will be affected. There was some feeling that since passenger volumes will be known, it will not be difficult to anticipate the level of service that will be required and that will be appropriate for historical levels of weekend usage of trains.

“They would have to run them even more frequently than the trains because obviously they are a lot smaller than a train”

[Weekend Leisure User]

"I would have thought they know statistically how many they need to lay on. They know how many tickets they sell and what times and routes"
[Weekend Leisure User]

"It is a bit of a suck it and see. They have to put some plan into action but be prepared to review that almost weekly or monthly and amend it and nobody really knows the answer until that happens do they?"
[Weekend Leisure User]

4. Timetable

The common expectation among passengers was for the replacement service timetable to be based on the current train timetable rather than needing to replicate it exactly. Indeed it was recognised that attempting to match train departure times would in fact be inappropriate since this would fail to meet the more important need to coordinate with Colchester train connections, due to longer journey times by bus. Instead, passengers requested a mix of fast and stopping services that would also reflect the structure of the existing train timetable and the needs of users of intermediate stations.

"As long as there are as many coaches as there would be trains it wouldn't matter if they are 5, 10, 20 minutes earlier or later"
[Walton London Commuter]

"They have also got to bear in mind that the journey's going to take longer isn't it from Walton-on-Naze to Colchester and Clacton to Colchester so they've really got to adjust the bus timetables accordingly. If it is going to take 10 minutes or 20 minutes longer then you have to set a beginning time 10 or 20 minutes earlier than what the trains are I would have thought"
[Weekend Leisure User]

Overall therefore, the vast majority of users represented in this project felt that they had fairly basic needs of a replacement service and indeed these were almost always met by the current proposals that were presented for research.

Response To Replacement Service Suggestions

Two proposed bus replacement schedules (Plan 1 and Plan 2) and corresponding timetables were provided for research purposes. Details of these plans and timetables can be found in Appendix 2 of this report.

Responses to the proposed replacement schedules and timetables were extremely clear and consistent across all user groups represented in the sample. There was a unanimous preference for Plan 1 to the extent that exposure to the details of it had the almost immediate effect of allaying previously voiced concerns regarding the disruption caused by the engineering works among all user groups.

The most important consideration in this respect was the fact that Plan 1 immediately appeared to offer a more comprehensive timetable simply by virtue of providing more services per hour. At a more considered level, the timetable for Plan 1 shows that journey times for services on the most popular routes will be faster than in Plan 2 and that in this respect it was felt to be close to the current train timetable.

“Plan 2 is a little bit more of a bitty, stoppy service for different stations whereas on Plan 1 there is a fast service for most of the popular stations and for the ones that are less popular there is still a service which would cover the passengers but a semi-fast one”
[Clacton London Commuter]

“It is a lot more tricky to go to Walton on these plans but if you had to pick one Plan 1 is a lot better because it differentiates. It goes Thorpe and then Walton. This one is going to Clacton and then out to Kirby, Frinton and Walton so at least another half and hour on their journey which is, you know, fairly unreasonable”
[Walton London Commuter]

“Plan 1 looks a lot better on paper for people who go from Frinton and Walton”
[Walton London Commuter]

The overwhelming view among passengers was therefore that Plan 1 was not just the better of the two suggestions but represented what many regarded as an optimal replacement service. Indeed, those most likely to need the replacement service considered that the proposals would cause only minimal disruption to their journeys and that in this respect were therefore as good as could be hoped for.

“Plan 1 is obviously preferable and looks similar to the service that was in operation when the bridge was struck at Weeley”
[Clacton London Commuter]

“I occasionally have to go to work on Saturday and this looks like it would only take me ten minutes longer to get to Colchester”
[Clacton London Commuter]

“I choose Plan 1 because it is more direct, it is non-stop, but if you wanted all stations you could.”
[Clacton Local Commuter]

“I definitely prefer Plan 1 so I would be prepared to give it a go and see how I got on with it”
[Weekend Leisure User]

Logistics

The specific details of the logistics surrounding the bus replacement were felt to be inconsequential to most as long as their basic needs were met by the provision of an efficient service that would minimise the disruption and inconvenience caused to passengers. Detailed responses to various aspects of the replacement service however can be summarised as follows:

1. Departure Times

As previously discussed, actual departure times per se were felt to be largely irrelevant. Instead, passengers were more concerned that the frequency of the replacement service would be similar to weekend trains and that departure times would be timed to coincide with connecting services from Colchester. Most hoped that the replacement service would be as regular as the trains initially but that it would be acceptable for it to vary according to demand over time when weekend usage patterns during the period of disruption had settled.

2. Saturday / Sunday Issues

Although some suggested that it would be less confusing at first if the same timetable were to apply on Saturday and Sunday, the majority conceded that in reality this was not necessary and that different timetables for both days would be acceptable. This is consistent with the frequently expressed view that the replacement timetable should match demand rather than the current train service.

It is worth noting in this respect that some anticipated seasonal fluctuations in service frequency in order to accommodate increased levels of tourist demand during the holiday season.

*“The thing is this is a seaside town as well and it does get very busy on
a Sunday”
[Clacton London Commuter]*

*“They would know how many tickets they sell on a Saturday compared
to a Sunday”
[Weekend Leisure User]*

3. Vehicles

With regard to vehicle preference, the common response was to expect that the optimum solution would be to provide the best of both worlds, since most failed to appreciate the trade off between comfort and DDA compliance. The most common considered view however was that passenger comfort should be a priority and that vehicles should be clean, modern and air-conditioned. Those who travelled at weekends with children felt additionally that on-board toilet facilities would be essential.

"I would organise coaches not buses for a start because most of the buses they put on when there are problems with the trains are boneshakers"

"Well I prefer a coach personally"

"I think a coach"

"Yes they are warmer for a start"

[Clacton Local Commuters]

"I think a bus would be better because there's more room"

"I don't know"

"Double deckers"

"Yes, there is more room"

"I've never been on a comfy coach because the seats are so close to each other. Buses have got more room therefore they are more comfortable. And they've got more leg space on them"

[Walton Local Commuters]

"It's also what buses they put on because I mean the buses that they use round here are double deckers sometimes. They use all the same buses for all the children's runs for the schools and they are so horrible and they're old. If they're going to do that for two years, they'd have to get a proper bus service in, a proper one"

[Weekday Leisure User]

"I have a 7 year old and wherever she goes for an hour journey or whatever I can guarantee that she will want to go to the toilet"

[Weekend Leisure User]

"If it was my opinion just for myself I would say quickest but I know quickest isn't always best for the public. But for me a coach"

[Weekend Leisure User]

While most acknowledged that the provision of DDA compliant vehicles would be 'desirable', the majority were reluctant to compromise their own level of personal comfort in order to achieve this. It should be noted that the only respondent with an obvious physical disability in the sample agreed with this view.

However, it is worth mentioning at this point that respondent feedback on this issue may be somewhat unreliable. One or two London Commuters requested similar coaches to those used for the replacement service during the Ipswich tunnel work when in fact the vehicles used on this occasion had been DDA compliant buses.

4. Train Stations

All user groups expressed similar views regarding the importance of keeping stations open during the period covered by the engineering works. Indeed there was a common feeling that there would be a greater need than usual for the stations to be manned to a higher level than is currently the case at certain stations during this time. This was primarily due to the fact that passengers would still need to purchase tickets and that it would be important for staff to be available to provide information. Furthermore, some anticipated that there would be a greater demand for station facilities such as toilets, catering and comfortable and secure shelter during the period of service disruption (even where these do not exist or are felt to be inadequate at present).

3.4 Clacton Blockade

Towards the end of the group discussions, respondents were informed that towards the end of the engineering works there would be a total blockade of the section of line between Clacton and Thorpe-Le-Soken for a period of three to six weeks. Responses to this specific aspect of the engineering works varied considerably according to user group and can be summarised as follows:

Impact On User Groups

1. Clacton London Commuters

The prospect of a total blockade caused a degree of initial panic among the Clacton Commuter groups. The London Commuters especially regarded this as cause for considerable concern about the impact on their journey to and from work to the extent that some expressed irritation and annoyance. In the context of earlier discussions relating to the replacement service however, most thought that the blockade would represent a major inconvenience rather than an insurmountable problem for them. The majority were consoled by the fact that the blockade would be for a relatively short and finite period only and that since Thorpe is close by that they would be able to endure the additional disruption and may even get used to it once a pattern of using the replacement service had become established.

“If they are going to lay coaches on it’s going to take longer to get where we are going. We’re going to have to get up earlier and come home later. That would be the impact”

[Clacton London Commuter]

“The train I get is the train that comes in from London so if that train gets cancelled there is no train to take me into London”

“And that is quite a common one that 7.10 to be cancelled”

[Clacton London Commuters]

“I would either get an earlier bus or say to work well I am going to be a bit late”

[Clacton London Commuter]

“We need to have some kind of forewarning rather than all of a sudden to turn up and realise that this has happened.

So as long as it is planned out and it is well advertised and there are enough buses or coaches available because people think that Clacton is the backside of the world.

[Clacton London Commuter]

“There are a hell of a lot of commuters from Clacton and if the buses are not there to shift that number of people there is going to be trouble”

[Clacton London Commuter]

“In the morning there are trains leaving Clacton from 25 past 5 right up until quarter to 8. They are going basically every half hour. So you have to factor that in as well”

[Clacton London Commuter]

“They have got to leave earlier though than the trains leaving Clacton to make sure you get to Thorpe in time to make the connection”

[Clacton London Commuter]

2. Clacton Local Commuters

Most of the Local Commuters from Clacton were fairly relaxed about the news of the blockade, especially since there was a common expectation that the replacement service would be well established and functioning efficiently by this stage of the engineering works. They anticipated that the blockade would represent a minor inconvenience in the context of their relatively short commutes on the basis that the first leg of the journey would take a little longer than usual during this time.

“By that time surely they will have sorted the buses out to a level where they have got rid of all the problems and ironed them out and that should be sufficient to get everybody there”

[Clacton Local Commuter]

“That is exactly what we said that if they are efficient and they leave on time and get there on time and there is a train waiting then it shouldn't mess anyone up because it is quite a short journey from Clacton to Thorpe anyway”

[Clacton Local Commuter]

“Well I think that in an ideal world what they would do is make the buses from Clacton tie up with the connection at Thorpe that would actually get you into Colchester at the same time”

[Clacton Local Commuter]

3. Clacton Leisure Users

Leisure Users were unperturbed by news of the blockade which they regarded as a problem for commuters rather than themselves. Most recognised that their journeys were often discretionary and generally flexible to the extent that they could choose to make fewer journeys during this period or that their needs would be adequately met by the replacement or regular bus service. One respondent claimed that she would cycle to Thorpe instead.

“I probably wouldn’t even go for those 3 weeks“

“You’d have to go on a bus, you’d have no choice”

“I wouldn’t bother to go to Colchester at the weekend I don’t think”

“No, the same here”

“I would just look forward to it being done and being reopened again to catch a train again. Wait until it was back to normal basically”

[Weekday Leisure Users]

“It’s not going to make any difference to us, it is the commuters who spend a fortune on season tickets and can’t even get a seat. Let alone finding that they are spending all this money and they can’t even get a train”

[Weekend Leisure User]

Passenger Needs And Priorities

The common consensus regarding the Clacton blockade was that a reliable replacement service for those who would be most directly affected would be provided by applying common sense solutions and learnings from experiences of the replacement service that will have been in operation over weekends already by this time. The main needs and priorities of the Clacton user groups during the blockade can be summarised into the following areas:

1. General

As part of the communications that are expected to be ongoing during the period of the engineering works, it was felt to be especially important that the Clacton blockade would be preceded by a specific, dedicated and high visibility campaign to provide those affected with a long enough period of advance notice to make the necessary adjustments to their travel plans and lifestyles. One or two London Commuters with expensive annual season tickets felt that the blockade represented sufficient grounds for them to be entitled to some form of compensation for the inevitable inconvenience that they would experience.

2. Replacement Service

Commuters were hopeful that the replacement service would need to be a constant shuttle running between Clacton and Thorpe during the busiest (peak) periods in order to cope with demand. The minimum expectation was that the replacement would be carefully timetabled to coordinate with train departures from Thorpe, which themselves would need to be flexible enough during this period to wait for buses from Clacton when necessary. Some with period passes assumed that these would be valid for use on the replacement services and others would welcome specific reassurance on this matter.

3. If Driving

The idea of driving from Clacton to Thorpe rather than using the replacement bus service was not regarded as a realistic option for many. The main reason offered for this was that the parking facilities at Thorpe were regarded as inadequate to cope with the likely increase in demand and those who were familiar with the area were unable to imagine how additional parking spaces could be provided. Additionally, women especially expressed concern about personal security due to poor lighting around Thorpe station and others anticipated that driving to Thorpe would create traffic problems that would make the journey by car too slow to be worthwhile. Those who would consider driving to Thorpe expected that free parking would be available during the blockade (especially for season ticket holders) to avoid being penalised further by the disruption to services. There was no interest expressed towards the possibility of driving to Walton instead of Thorpe.

*“If you come from Clacton and you have a train pass from Clacton you should be able to park in there and put some lights in the car park because it is pretty scary in that car park at night”
[Clacton London Commuter]*

*“When they have had problems at Thorpe before with the trains and everything it is very dark at Thorpe station and they need to increase the safety and security of people moving about. There are going to be a lot of people moving about on buses”
[Clacton Local Commuter]*

*“I don’t think people will drive there”
“It’s not very secure parking”
“That wouldn’t bother me because I’m a cycle freak”
“It’s not a quick journey to Thorpe, it’s like country lanes”
“But would there be enough spaces because a lot of people already park at Thorpe, they park down that hill don’t they?”
[Weekday Leisure User]*

Walton Blockade

Some groups were also asked about the implications of a blockade between Walton and Thorpe to accommodate other engineering works unrelated to the resignalling. In brief summary, responses were largely consistent with those outlined above in relation to the Clacton blockade since the impact on the various user groups was anticipated to be similar.

There are two key differences however can be highlighted in this respect. Firstly, the replacement bus service would not in this case be the direct shuttle that had been envisaged for the Clacton blockade due to the need to service the intermediate stations between Walton and Thorpe. Secondly, even if a direct and stopping service were to be provided, the direct journey by bus from Walton to Thorpe would take longer than from Clacton to Thorpe. Inevitably therefore, a Walton blockade will cause greater inconvenience to passengers who use this line albeit for a shorter period of time than will be the case for the Clacton blockade.

3.5 Information and Communications

During the course of the research, it became apparent that the need for an unmissable, integrated and well organised campaign was often felt to be almost as important to passengers than the specific details of the replacement service.

The primary channels and specific media that were widely expected to be utilised in this respect are summarised as follows:

1. *At Train Stations*

- Knowledgeable staff with up-to-date information (basic requirement)
- Notice boards
- Posters and other advertising
- Leaflets and handouts
- Information provided with or printed on tickets

2. *On Trains*

- Advertising
- Dot matrix displays
- Announcements (although some resistance to this)

3. *Other Sources*

- Websites (especially One and Network Rail)
- Local newspaper and radio bulletins
- Newsletters to provide regular updates
- Mailings to season ticket holders
- Registering to receive (free) texts or emails
- 0800 number constantly available

*“Post the information to season ticket holders”
[Clacton London Commuter]*

*“Well I do get a monthly newsletter. That would be ideal”
[Walton London Commuter]*

“As long as someone tells you, if a notice board tells you that something is going to happen that affects you then you can ask someone. As long as the person who you ask knows then I am happy. If I go to a person and ask him and he hasn’t got a clue then I will be pissed off”

[Walton London Commuter]

“I wouldn’t expect the notice board or anything to have excessive detail but if it gave you a rough idea and you then had the option to get a leaflet that would go into details of the times that would be ideal”

[Walton London Commuter]

“You just want advance notice don’t you? And once they have set that timetable out, if there is any change you want to know”

[Walton London Commuter]

“It is treating the passengers with respect, letting them know what is going on”

“If you are getting a coach you have to wake up earlier and make different arrangements and probably go out less”

“Yes practically it probably wouldn’t make any difference whatsoever just out of courtesy”

[Walton London Commuter]

“The replacement timetable as leaflets would be valuable”

[Walton London Commuter]

“The train station needs to be very clear with a nice board up or some sort of electronic system which says this bus is starting from so and so, so that there is a synchronisation of services”

“It needs a guard or somebody there”

“It needs staff”

“You have to be told at every step on the way”

[Clacton Local Commuters]

“Via a mail shot because the data is already on there. Radio”

“Local paper, text, e-mail. On the trains they have little boxes. Big notices on the station”

“And somebody to ask at the station”

“A visible staff presence even when the buses are in operation”

“And warning before it is going to happen”

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“If you are going to start it in the summer maybe consider telling the commuters now”

“It really needs to be in your face, because we are all a bit lazy about things like that because we turn up and hope the train is going to be there”

[Clacton Local Commuters]

“If you’re a regular train user, you use it on a daily basis, because whenever you get to Wivenhoe, the train driver always says ‘Please mind the gap between the trains’. You hear that every day so if they announced it on the train, you would be made aware of it. On every service if they made an announcement, that would get to everybody rather than posters, leaflets whatever”

[Walton Local Commuter]

“Local free paper”

“They should have a big board up. They should have a big information board”

“Free information telephone line”

“They could put it on their telephone, the number you ring up couldn’t they? I don’t think it’s free though”

[Weekday Leisure Users]

“Surely it depends on how well they notify the general public their customers doesn’t it? It is all about communication I guess”

[Weekend Leisure User]

4. Conclusions & Recommendations

At the time of conducting the research, awareness of the proposed engineering works was extremely vague and limited to a small number of individuals represented in the sample. In our view, this represents an opportunity to launch a campaign of information to educate and inform the different user groups and passengers who will be affected by the engineering work.

News of the work was met with a mixed response when respondents were informed during the focus group sessions. Encouragingly, the majority seem likely to acknowledge the long-term benefits for them as users of the service, even if these may be difficult for many to appreciate initially. Regular weekday commuters are most concerned about the implications of the work on their journeys, even though they recognise they should be unaffected in theory if work is conducted at weekends as planned.

Most passengers recognise that conducting the work at the weekend only will cause the least disruption for the most regular and dependant users, even though this means that the work will take a long time to complete. Weekend Leisure Users who will be most directly affected may be least likely to have a convenient alternative available to them but this user group also acknowledged that they have high degrees of flexibility regarding journeys made. Those who expressed greatest concern were the small minority who travel by train to work on Saturdays, especially if they are *not* starting their journey from Clacton or Walton and/or *not* travelling to Colchester (e.g. Frinton to Hythe).

The replacement service provided will naturally be of critical importance in terms of minimising the amount of disruption and inconvenience caused to passengers for the duration of the works. In this respect, many are able to recall recent positive experiences that are hoped will provide the benchmark for expectations on this occasion. Indeed, the vast majority were reassured on exposure to the two alternative bus replacement plans presented for research, of which Plan 1 was unanimously preferred and widely felt to be as good as could be hoped for in the circumstances and was universally felt to meet and even exceed expectations of what would be required in order to minimise disruption. The most critical test of the replacement service however will be during the blockade of the Clacton branch line and during this

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period (London) commuters will have to depend on a reliable contingency.

There was a common consensus across our sample that information and communications about the details of the engineering works and replacement service will be of critical importance. Indeed we would suggest that many passengers are likely to judge One Railway and Network Rail on the basis of their efficiency in this respect rather than solely on the performance of the replacement service. On the evidence from this research we believe it will be essential to provide as much advance notice as possible via an integrated campaign as a basic courtesy to users of the service who will be affected by the disruption in order to allow them maximum time to make necessary changes to plans and lifestyles to accommodate the alternative transport arrangements.

5. Appendix

5.1 Discussion Guide

(Introductory explanation to use as required)

This research is being undertaken by Passenger Focus, the independent national rail consumer watchdog working closely with Network Rail, who own and operate the railway infrastructure on which trains in Britain run and with 'one' railway, who run trains on this route under a franchise agreement,

Passenger Focus' mission is to get the best deal for rail passengers.

Helping to ensure that plans at times of major engineering work take account of what passengers need is part of achieving that mission

This research is being funded jointly by Passenger Focus, Network Rail and 'one' railway

Introduction

- Explanation of nature and purpose of research
- Respondent introductions/demographics
- Nature of train journeys frequently undertaken
- Brief warm-up exercise (as required)

Journey Details

- (To provide context for future discussion)
- Explore current travel preferences / patterns
- Focus especially on current rail usage
- Discuss frequency / purpose of rail travel
- Explore rail journeys made by user group / segment
 - Local station used most often
 - Method(s) of travel used to local station
 - Destination station(s) travelled to
 - Days & times of journeys typically made
- Discuss type of ticket most often used for journeys made
 - Daily or period tickets
 - Any railcard holding / usage

Background

- What role does rail travel play in current lifestyles
- Extent to which respondents are dependant on affected routes
- How much flexibility exists in travel arrangements
 - Regarding stations used
 - Day & time of travel
- What alternatives are available, when/if required
- Give examples of occasions when services have been disrupted
 - What are typical reasons for this happening
 - How does this affect travel plans
 - Extent of disruption caused
 - What are most/least inconvenient times for this to occur
 - What do passengers do to accommodate disruption
- Understanding of all above issues by user group / segment

Resignalling Work (spontaneous)

- Extent of awareness of work to be carried out
- Spontaneous attitudes / feelings about this news
- Anticipated impact on journeys/lifestyles as discussed above
- Assess response and key concerns among rail user groups
- What are primary information requirements at this stage

Resignalling Work (prompted)

Outline the nature of the work to be undertaken, the reasons why it is necessary, anticipated impact on train services and the future benefits for rail users.

Full discussion of passenger issues and priorities:

- Any general views to start?
- What are the positive outtakes from a passenger perspective?
- Do passengers accept the need to improve/upgrade the infrastructure?
- Do passengers recognise the future advantages for them?
- Highlight any reservations or negatives
- Response to likely scale of the work planned
- Response to scheduled timeframe for the engineering works
- At what times do passengers hope/expect the work to be conducted
- What will they do during the disruption?
- What alternative transport arrangements would they like?
- Are these requirements different for people with cars vs. non-car users?

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- Anticipated impact on parking facilities? What are minimum requirements/needs in this respect?
- Frequency of replacement buses / other alternative arrangements in place?
- Would any user groups expect to receive compensation? What is envisaged & how would they go about claiming this?
- How would they like to be kept up-to-date with progress on the work? What are the key information requirements?
- Out of all the issues raised, which are the key concerns/priorities for the different passenger categories – is there a preferred solution?

Draft proposals for alternative bus services

Probe for passenger needs/requirements for bus replacement service. ***Introduce Plans 1 & 2 in rotated order & explain that these are only possible solutions at this stage. Also show specimen timetables to match each of the plans.***

- Any prior awareness of services
- What had been expected
- How do respondents feel about proposals
- Reaction of the different passenger types
- Any concerns?
- Extent of likely disruption
- How will this affect journeys made
- What are minimum expectations & requirements in this respect
- What would be ideal
- What could passengers live with
- What would be unacceptable
- Any ideas to do it differently / improvements

Specific / detailed prompts regarding bus service

- What do passengers think of service frequencies
- What about journey times
- How will each of the Plans impact on journey planning
- Is it important for services to match normal scheduled train departure times
- Should the replacement service operate the same timetable on Saturday and Sunday
- Would it be acceptable to operate different schedules on both days
- Which of the two plan are preferred

**Passenger Requirements During Resignalling Disruption
Report of Research Findings for Passenger Focus
March 2007**

- Any preference for coaches vs. busses? (Coaches are more comfortable but have steps so can't be used by disabled & access may be difficult for elderly). DDA vehicles have less comfortable seats. Explore preferences by user group.
- When Clacton-Thorpe is closed, would anyone consider driving to Walton instead of Thorpe to avoid congestion at Thorpe & because there is a 300 space car park next to the station. Explore responses to a modest daily parking charge or is free parking expected?

Information Requirements

- Discuss passenger priorities before the planned work starts
- What do passengers need to know
- What are the key concerns
- How best to address and allay concerns
- What channels of information are expected
- What channels are preferred
- What information do they need?
- What is the best way to convey that information to them?
- How far in advance should information be available?

Summary

- Summarise key output from session
- Overview of reactions to proposed engineering works
- What are key issues
- What are key learnings
- Likely extent of disruption to travel plans
- What are key concerns
- How to help allay these concerns
- Key information requirements
- Key messages for Passenger Focus
- How to best provide reassurance to passengers
- What practical help can be provided

5.2 Stimulus Materials

BUS REPLACEMENT PLAN 1

Saturdays

From London

- Non-stop xx.12 service Colchester – Clacton.
- Non-stop xx.12 service Colchester – Wivenhoe.
- Semi-fast xx.16 service, non-stop Colchester – Thorpe le Soken, then all stations to Walton on Naze.
- Stopping service xx.46 all stations Colchester – Clacton (with connection at Thorpe-le-Soken for stations to Walton on Naze).

To London

- Non-stop xx.10 service Clacton – Colchester.
- Non stop xx.35 service Wivenhoe – Colchester
- Semi-fast xx.50 all stations Walton on Naze – Thorpe-le-Soken then non-stop to Colchester
- Stopping service xx.55 all stations Clacton – Colchester (with connection from all stations from Walton at Thorpe-le-Soken).

Sundays

From London

- Non-stop xx.40 service Colchester – Clacton.
- Stopping service xx.40 Colchester –Walton on Naze calling at all normal Sunday stations (with connection at Thorpe-le-Soken for Clacton).
- Connectional xx.40 service at Thorpe-le-Soken for Clacton.

To London

- Non-stop xx.40 service Clacton – Colchester.
- Stopping service xx.00 Walton on Naze – Colchester calling all normal Sunday Stations (with connection from Clacton at Thorpe-le-Soken).
- Connectional xx.05 Service at Clacton for Thorpe-le-Soken.

Note – Normal Sunday stations are:-Wivenhoe, Alresford, Great Bentley, Thorpe-le-Soken.

BUS REPLACEMENT PLAN 2

Saturdays

From London

- Semi-fast xx.12 service non-stop Colchester – Clacton, then Kirby Cross, Frinton and Walton on Naze.
- Stopping service xx.12 all stations Colchester – Clacton (with connection at Clacton for stations to Walton on Naze).
- Non-stop xx.46 service Colchester – Wivenhoe

To London

- Non stop xx.20 service Wivenhoe – Colchester
- Semi-fast xx.10 all stations Walton on Naze, Frinton, Kirby Cross, the Clacton (xx.45) then non-stop to Colchester
- Stopping service xx.55 all stations Clacton – Colchester (with connection from all stations from Walton at Clacton).

Sundays

From London

- Semi-fast xx.40 service non-stop Colchester – Clacton, then Kirby Cross, Frinton and Walton on Naze.
- Stopping service xx.40 all normal Sunday stations Colchester – Clacton (with connection at Clacton for stations to Walton on Naze).

To London

- Semi-fast xx.05 all stations Walton on Naze, Frinton, Kirby Cross, the Clacton (xx.40) then non-stop to Colchester
- Stopping service xx.40 all stations Clacton – Colchester (with connection from all stations from Walton at Clacton).

Note – Normal Sunday stations are:- Wivenhoe, Alresford, Great Bentley, Thorpe-le-Soken.



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Passenger Focus is the operating
name of the Rail Passengers Council