



Passenger Needs During **Birmingham New Street Redevelopment**

Qualitative Research

Report of Findings

Prepared for Passenger Focus and Network Rail

December 2010

Foreword

Birmingham New Street station is used by 25 million¹ passengers annually. This is more than twice the volume it was designed to handle when it was last rebuilt in the 1960s. The current station is dark, crowded and difficult for passengers with heavy luggage or disabilities to get around. The Gateway project will redevelop the station into a brighter and more modern transport interchange by 2015. The key objectives of the redevelopment are to double passenger capacity, radically improve accessibility, improve links to and through the city centre for pedestrians and ensure that journeys through the heart of Birmingham will be optimised for years to come.



Network Rail and Passenger Focus are committed to putting the needs of the passenger at the heart of the Gateway project – from the design stage through delivery to the finished station and beyond.

The Gateway project has been planned to keep passenger disruption to a minimum. Most of the construction work will take place off-site and all train services will continue to operate throughout the redevelopment. However, the partners recognised the need to understand passengers' views, expectations and concerns to assist in producing effective passenger information for every stage of the project and a series of focus groups were held in January 2010.

This follows the work in July 2009 when Passenger Focus co-ordinated a walkthrough of New Street station with volunteers who had a range of mobility and/or sensory impairments. [The report, *Building accessibility into the redevelopment of Birmingham New Street Station*, can be found at www.passengerfocus.org.uk and will be used by Network Rail in developing the fine detail of the design, and meetings with a range of disability groups are ongoing.]

The results of the research will be used by Network Rail and Passenger Focus to ensure that passengers are well informed and regularly updated of developments and any changes to their journey throughout the project.

The Gateway project aims to deliver world-class facilities for passengers, and Network Rail will continue to work with Passenger Focus to put the needs of passengers at the heart of the project.

¹ Office of Rail Regulation Station Usage 2008/09 Summary Report: http://www.rail-reg.gov.uk/upload/pdf/stn_usage_report_0809.pdf

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Management Summary

Research was conducted to understand passengers' views, concerns and any experiences so far of the redevelopment of Birmingham New Street station to assist in producing effective passenger information throughout the project.

6 group discussions (6-8 respondents per 90 minute session) were conducted among rail users making journeys to and from Birmingham New Street and those interchanging there. The research was conducted in January 2010.

The key findings that Passenger Focus and Network Rail should note are:

1. Passengers spontaneously acknowledge the need for Birmingham New Street station to be improved and modernised and therefore welcomed news of the redevelopment programme.
2. Positive responses to the redevelopment programme far outweighed the reservations that were expressed.
 - The main positives are: the hope and expectation that improvements will ensure that the station is redeveloped in line with the recent regeneration of the area.
 - The main negatives are: a concern that passengers will bear some of the cost of the redevelopment through increased fares and that the disruption to services would, in practice, be worse than claimed.
3. Passenger concerns are largely confined to the issue of service disruption, which was consistently defined in broader terms than we have observed for similar projects in the past. On this occasion, this is often interpreted to mean journey disruption that could include delays caused by platform changes rather than being confined to service delays and cancellations only.
4. Consequently, the way in which disruption is communicated during the course of the project is likely to be important to passengers. In this respect, reference to 'minimal disruption' was often resisted on the basis of being too literal in its application to services only. While this is obviously good news for passengers and therefore should be communicated, care should be taken to ensure that the tone of these messages will not create cynicism among passengers or create some kind of hostage to fortune.

5. In the context of relatively low level passenger needs and concerns, it will be important for the rail industry to bear in mind the following issues:
- It is likely that passenger interests will be best served by addressing the information needs that exist on different levels: awareness building, ongoing and ad hoc response to day-to-day issues
 - The visuals selected for use in passenger information will need to strike a careful balance between creating impact and engagement among the target audience while not appearing to be at odds with messages that refer to the extent of likely inconvenience or disruption caused by the redevelopment work

Conclusions

This research indicates that the following suggestions should be adopted in order to develop effective passenger information around the redevelopment of Birmingham New Street station:

- **Avoid direct reference to the value of the project or allay concerns that this will be recovered through fare increases**
- **Consider structuring communications according to the three levels suggested in order to maximise the impact and efficiency of passenger information**
- **Provide Level 1 and 2 information at the earliest possible opportunity. Level 1 should be to create awareness and interest in the project and Level 2 should provide progress reports focusing on practical implications for passengers**
- **Work in collaboration with other stakeholders, especially Train Operating Companies (TOCs), in order to fulfil passenger expectations that information and communications will be integrated throughout the redevelopment project**
- **The needs of disabled passengers are likely to be greater and ongoing contact with the relevant groups should be maintained throughout the regeneration.**

1. Research Context & Objectives

Birmingham New Street station currently handles about 80% of total daily train services into and through Birmingham and is used by 25 million passengers every year. As a consequence of its geographical location, Birmingham New Street acts as a gateway station and handles long distance trains from Euston to the North, services from the South and the South-West to Scotland, Newcastle and Manchester / Liverpool and the East-West services to East Anglia and through Central Wales.

The Gateway project will redevelop the current 1960s-built station into a brighter and more modern transport interchange for Birmingham by 2015. The key objectives of the £600m redevelopment project at New Street are to double passenger capacity, transform the passenger experience, improve links to and through the city centre for pedestrians and ensure that journeys through the heart of Birmingham will be optimised for years to come.

The delivery of this project is essential in order to meet the growing demand for train travel and will ensure that the station will be able to cope with the anticipated increase in passenger numbers for the next 30-40 years.

Since New Street will not close over the period that the work will be conducted, the project has been planned in a way that will allow train services to run throughout the period of the work in order to minimise disruption for people that use the station.

The project will be carried out by Network Rail. It is backed by Network Rail, Birmingham City Council, Advantage West Midlands, Centro and the Department for Transport. The redevelopment will create:

- Room for even more passengers to use the station in comfort
- More accessible, brighter and clearer platforms, with new escalators and new public lifts
- A grand concourse that is three and a half times bigger than at present, enclosed by a giant, light-filled atrium
- A stunning new station facade
- Better links to and through the station for pedestrians, with eight new entrances

The proposed timetable for delivery of this work is as follows:

- September 2009: work started to prepare part of the NCP car park next to the station for construction of a new concourse
- 2010: work starts on construction of the new concourse in the former car park (Phase 1)
- 2010: work expected to start at platform level. One platform face will be closed at a time, and all services will be phased to other platforms
- 2012: New concourse expected to open to passengers and old concourse closed for redevelopment (Phase 2)
- 2015: Redevelopment of New Street station expected to complete

Passenger Focus and Network Rail wished to understand passengers' views, concerns and any experiences so far of the redevelopment to assist in effective passenger communication throughout the project.

The overall objectives of this research were:

1. To introduce passengers who are current users of the station to news of the Birmingham New Street redevelopment programme and to evaluate initial reactions
2. To identify and understand the full range of passenger concerns at a spontaneous level and to indicate a prioritisation of these for Passenger Focus and Network Rail
3. At a prompted level, to assess the issues likely to result in the greatest concern and frustration to passengers during the redevelopment period
4. To identify what practical steps passengers expect the rail industry to take in advance to minimise the negative impact of the work that will need to be undertaken
5. To understand the extent to which the needs of passengers are likely to be met by what can realistically be delivered by the parties concerned in this respect
6. To provide the rail industry with insight as to how it can best maintain passenger satisfaction among users of Birmingham New Street during the redevelopment (or how to contain and mitigate any dissatisfaction)
7. To provide an early indication of the nature and extent of the information needs of the different user groups before and during the period of disruption

2. Methodology & Sample

Qualitative research comprising focus groups was conducted to meet the research objectives. The sample was constructed to represent a broad cross-section of rail passengers who travel from or into Birmingham New Street station as well as those who interchange there in order to reflect the views of various user groups travelling at peak and off-peak times. The sample encompassed commuters, leisure users and business users of the four train operators serving Birmingham New Street station (Virgin, Cross Country, Arriva and London Midland). The research included a spread of journey lengths and a mix of age and socio-economic groups.

Fieldwork was conducted in Birmingham and Coventry in January 2010. Full details of the sample structure are outlined below:

Six group discussions, each lasting approximately 90 minutes with 6-8 respondents in each session:

- **Group 1.** Rail passengers who use Birmingham New Street as their starting or destination station for business journeys. The group contained a mixture of passengers travelling to / from Birmingham New Street station. There were no more than two respondents using any of the four TOCs in this group
- **Group 2.** Rail passengers who use Birmingham New Street station to make a connecting journey for business journeys. There were no more than two respondents using any of the four TOCs in this group
- **Group 3.** Rail passengers who use Birmingham New Street as their starting or destination station for commuting journeys. The group contained a mixture of passengers travelling to / from Birmingham New Street station. There were no more than two respondents using any of the four TOCs in this group
- **Group 4.** Rail passengers who use Birmingham New Street station to make a connecting journey for commuting journeys. There were no more than two respondents using any of the four TOCs in this group
- **Group 5.** Rail passengers who use Birmingham New Street as their starting or destination station for leisure journeys. The group

contained a mixture of passengers travelling to / from Birmingham New Street station. There were no more than two respondents using any of the four TOCs in this group

- **Group 6.** Rail passengers who use Birmingham New Street station to make a connecting journey for leisure journeys. There were no more than two respondents using any of the four TOCs in this group

Additional recruitment criteria:

- A mix of both sexes in each group
- A representation of age groups and lifestages as appropriate to each of the passenger categories, e.g. mothers with (pre) school age children, students, retired/grandparents etc.
- A mix of social grades to reflect the profile of the local population and rail user groups (e.g. BC1; C2D)
- Frequent and infrequent rail users
- A representation of those with experience of making journeys with luggage, buggies and bicycles
- All passengers paid for the journeys they made. Passengers with free travel concessions were excluded.

Standard industry exclusions were applied to ensure that the research did not include any respondents who work in market research, marketing, advertising, journalism or anyone who works within the railway industry or public transport.

3. Main Findings

3.1 Reactions to Redevelopment Programme

3.1.1 Birmingham New Street: Usage and Attitudes

Since Birmingham New Street is used as an interchange rather than just a terminal, respondents claimed high levels of interaction with the station. The majority regarded it as functional rather than passenger friendly and not somewhere that you would plan to spend time unnecessarily. Some claimed it to be barely adequate for their needs as train travellers.

Birmingham New Street was felt to perform poorly against other major stations, especially London Euston, Manchester Piccadilly and Liverpool Lime Street as realistic comparisons or London St. Pancras at a more aspirational level.

“It’s a horrible place to have to wait at any time. It’s really dreary and depressing.”

[Business User]

“You wouldn’t want to be stuck there for any amount of time, would you?”

[Leisure User]

“I think it must be the worst train station in England.”

[Commuter]

3.1.2 Core Issues Identified With Birmingham New Street

There was a universal acknowledgement of the need for the station to be upgraded and improved in order to deliver an enhanced user experience at a number of levels:

Exterior

The station was felt to lack an external identity and one or two claimed the building to be almost invisible due to its lack of facade and unwelcoming main entrance. Locals considered the outdated 1960s

architecture to be an uninviting first impression of the city, especially to visitors, and particularly in contrast to the Bullring redevelopment that provides a more natural focal point for the area.

“The exterior is ghastly! It’s so dark and drab.”
[Business User]

“It looks really out of date and old-fashioned. It has looked the same as it does now all of my life.”
[Leisure User]

“It was built in the 60s and they haven’t revamped it since then. It doesn’t fit in because it’s next to the Bullring and Selfridges which are really nice.”
[Commuter]

Interior

The interior was felt to be consistent with expectations created from the outside in terms of it being underwhelming and unimpressive. In addition to always feeling uncomfortably busy, the environment was criticised for being dark and cold, due to the fact that much of the station is below ground level, resulting in a depressing experience for users.

“I hate it. It’s cold, dirty and depressing and really badly lit.”
[Commuter]

“It’s dark and dismal and the waiting rooms are always freezing.”
[Commuter]

Impressions of Birmingham

The station was felt to be unbecoming of Birmingham’s status as England’s second city and out of place due to the recent regeneration of the surrounding area. Rather than expressing a sense of local pride, this sample of respondents from the Midlands were overwhelmingly negative in their views.

“Birmingham is supposed to be the second city but the station doesn’t live up to that status.”
[Commuter]

*“It creates a rubbish first impression of Birmingham for visitors,
especially compared to the surroundings.”*

[Leisure User]

Facilities and Shops

Passengers felt that their basic needs were served by the station but were critical of the range and price of the catering provision. Additionally, many were unhappy about the lack of seating and waiting areas, the frequent queues at the ticket office and machines and some were especially unhappy about having to pay to use the toilets.

“At 5pm when I’m waiting for my train there’s not enough room on the platform and there’s nowhere to sit.”

[Commuter]

“I get really wound up about the toilets. I resent having to pay to use them. They should be free and more of them, like at Wolverhampton”

[Commuter]

“It’s always rammed when your train is delayed and there’s nothing to do.”

[Commuter]

“There are no London Midland ticket machines and always queues at the Virgin ones.”

[Business User]

3.1.3 Spontaneous Knowledge and Awareness of Redevelopment

There was reasonably high awareness of plans to redevelop the station but minimal knowledge of any specific details.

In contrast to the findings from similar research conducted for major station redevelopments¹, there was a greater interest and appetite for information relating to the plans for Birmingham New Street. This was as a consequence of the stronger sense of vested interest in the project among more locally recruited respondents, some of whom expressed surprise at their knowledge gap in relation to the work.

¹ King’s Cross Redevelopment: 2009; Passenger Focus and Network Rail; Outlook Research

“There have been rumours of redevelopment for years but nothing has happened.”

[Leisure User]

“I saw a picture of what it will look like on the news but that must have been about two years ago.”

[Business User]

“They’re going to knock it down and rebuild the whole thing. The plans for it look amazing, it looks like a spaceship from Flight of the Navigator.”

[Commuter]

3.1.4 Details of the Birmingham New Street Redevelopment Programme

The details of the redevelopment programme, as introduced to respondents in all focus groups and depth interviews, are outlined below:

The Vision For New Street

The £600m New Street redevelopment will see the current 1960s-built station transformed into a bright, modern, 21st century focal point for Birmingham. It will be exactly the kind of station passengers deserve, and will have a positive impact on the prosperity and perceptions of the city and the region.

The design will see New Street station wrapped in shimmering, carefully crafted stainless steel and includes a giant light-filled atrium. This bold concept will deliver a better and brighter station for the millions of people who use New Street every year.

Project Aims

The aim is to give Birmingham a world-class station boasting highlights such as:

- Room for even more passengers to use the station in comfort
- More accessible, brighter and clearer platforms, reached by new escalators and new public lifts

- A grand concourse that is three and a half times bigger than at present and enclosed by a giant, light-filled atrium
- A stunning new station facade, adding to Birmingham's growing reputation for good design
- Eight pedestrian entrances giving better links to and through the station
- The stimulus for the physical regeneration of the areas surrounding the station leading to the potential creation of over 10,000 new jobs across the city

3.1.5 Passenger Reactions to Vision and Aims

Participants' primary concern is how the redevelopment work will affect them, their services and their journeys. On this basis, overall responses were therefore very positive.

Detailed and specific reactions to hearing about the redevelopment programme can be summarised as follows:

Positive Reactions

Many were pleasantly surprised and impressed at the amount of money being invested in 'their' station. This was commonly felt to be long overdue and was widely regarded as a continuation of the regeneration of the Bullring and surrounding area to bring the station into the 21st Century. One or two wondered whether the redevelopment was part of the next generation of rail travel, specifically to accommodate High Speed 2 (HS2) trains or an extension of Eurostar services. In this context, there was some expression of hope that the current capacity of the station would be increased as a result of the work.

"The city needs a showpiece train station to match the airport. Along with the Bullring, this will make it a hat-trick for Birmingham."
[Commuter]

"It sounds amazing and it's long overdue to make it fit in better with its surroundings'."
[Commuters]

"I assume the changes won't be just cosmetic and for that money we will get more platforms that will eventually link up with HS2."
[Commuter]

In direct reference to the recession, it was noted that now may be a good time to get value for money from the construction industry and several respondents voiced hopes that the jobs created would be made available to local people.

Negative reactions

Encouragingly, negative reactions were significantly outweighed by anticipated advantages for the majority of respondents. This was primarily due to the fact that the redevelopment work is expected to have minimal impact on journeys, although some disruption to services was felt to be inevitable.

Exposure to the value of the project occasionally caused some concern, especially in the current climate since this raises the potential risk of work not being completed, especially as a project of this scale was expected to go on for many years.

“I can’t get my head around that amount of money. It must be going on for ages if it’s costing that much.”

[Commuters]

“It’s not necessary to spend that amount of money. In the current economic climate, what happens if the company building it go bust?”

[Leisure User]

This sum created concerns that the cost of the redevelopment would be passed on to passengers through increased fares. Unsurprisingly there was some resistance to this concept.

“Will the cost of this be going onto the price of the train tickets?”

[Leisure User]

In communicating details of the project, some wanted reassurance that the money would be used to make capacity improvements rather than simply cosmetic improvements and that it would be spent on improving the whole station, not just the exterior.

3.1.5 Passenger Exposure to Visuals



Showing visuals of what the station will look like on completion had a considerable impact on passenger responses to the proposed redevelopment. The images consistently had the effect of making respondents feel more enthusiastic about the project, which tended to provide additional weight to the positive comments previously voiced. These reactions have important implications for the way in which the communications materials should ideally be used.

“It looks really good. It would become one of the best train stations in the country.”
[Commuter]

The visuals were agreed to be stunning and more impressive than imagined and therefore exceeded expectations across all user groups. The interior views of the atrium perhaps achieved an even stronger impact than the bold statement made by the exterior design.

“It would be fab if it makes people think ‘blimey, Birmingham’s not what I thought it would be like’.”
[Leisure User]

“My only concern is whether it’s too modern and it will look out of date too quickly.”
[Business User]

3.2 Impact on Journeys

3.2.1 Response to Redevelopment Timetable

The specific details and timeline of the Birmingham New Street redevelopment work as introduced to respondents in all focus groups are outlined below:

The project will be conducted in two phases:

Phase 1: A brand new station concourse will be built in a former car park next to the station. Initial work to prepare the site for the new concourse started in September 2009 with the closure of the car park. The new concourse is expected to open for use in 2012.

Phase 2: The old station concourse will be closed and redeveloped. The project is due to be completed in 2015, when passengers will enjoy three and a half times more space.

Passengers felt that the proposed two-phase approach easily justified the length of the timetable for the redevelopment work and therefore suggested that this approach should be communicated and explained to users of the station.

This news was greeted with relief across the sample, especially by those who had anticipated the need for the station to be closed for a period of time. The opening of the new concourse was felt to provide passengers with a key milestone and the Olympic Games were mentioned as being a goal to work towards for the first phase of the project.

The two-phase approach was welcomed on the ground that this was expected to keep disruption to a minimum and therefore appeared to many to have been planned with passenger interests as a key priority.

3.2.2 Response to Anticipated Disruption

These details were introduced to respondents in all focus groups in the following format:

The work has been planned to allow passengers to continue to be able to catch trains as usual from New Street.

Activity has been planned to ensure minimal impact on trains and passengers for the duration of the work so disruption will be kept to a minimum.

All train services will continue to operate throughout the project and the Pallasades shopping centre will remain open.

Only one platform will be taken out of service at any one time, so there may be platform changes from when work starts inside the station later this year until completion in 2015. In 2012, passengers will start to use the new concourse with additional entrances and the existing concourse will close for redevelopment. The walkway from the Bullring shopping centre into the Pallasades (currently used as a route to the station) will remain open throughout. On completion in 2015, the concourse

areas will be joined and passengers will enjoy three and half times more space.

As previously noted, concerns relating to disruption are always critical for passengers but on this occasion it transpired that the way in which these details are expressed could be equally important.

Perhaps surprisingly, this news was not universally well received. The key issue in this respect was the perceived honesty and accuracy of the details as presented and the tone of the way in which they were communicated. Specifically in this respect, the references to minimal impact and disruption were often dismissed by respondents given the scale of the work. Although passengers naturally wanted to believe that this would be the case, many were sceptical about how this could be realistically achieved.

“It’s very positive to say that and optimistic but there will be fewer platforms for the same number of trains.”

[Commuter]

“I know they will try and do what it says but services have got to be affected somehow.”

[Commuter]

“There is bound to be congestion when they are moving plant and machinery around. How will they get the new roof on without causing any disruption?”

[Business User]

“I want to believe it but I won’t until I see it. There are bound to be unforeseen problems like cutting through power cables and stuff like that.”

[Commuter]

Reactions to the stimulus materials presented for the research indicate that there may be a danger of creating a credibility gap by making what are perceived to be overclaims from the outset. It may therefore be preferable to deliver this message in a way that will avoid the risk of under-delivering against optimistic initial expectations in order to maintain passenger confidence in the industry.

“It might be better to say there will be minor delays or they will be open to ridicule. It’s a very bold statement to make.”

[Commuter]

“They should be honest. There was disruption last week when it snowed.”

[Commuter]

3.2.3 Overview of Reactions by User Group

Naturally different user groups will be affected to differing degrees but the following reactions by user type suggest that this will not require different communications approaches or even specific targeting.

Commuters

The impact of the redevelopment work is likely to be highest among this group due to the frequency with which they are interacting with Birmingham New Street station. As commuters, these users tend to be set in their ways and routines, which are therefore susceptible to more disruption than other passenger groups. Due to the role played by the station in their lives, commuters were most resistant to the possibility of disruption to journeys.

“I use the same trains every day so even a minor thing like platform changes will be confusing for commuters and will cause disruption to journeys.”

[Commuter]

Business Users

Those travelling for business purposes have different pressures on their journeys. For this user group, time is essential as it can be measured in financial terms and they are therefore often making journeys on a tight schedule. Consequently, although they understood the rationale for the redevelopment, they are likely to be extremely unforgiving if they experience impact from disruption.

“So trains will run at the same times but from different platforms. I can’t see how that will happen.”

[Business User]

Leisure Users

Leisure Users are likely to be affected less than other passengers by the redevelopment work. Since they often travel under little or no time pressure, they acknowledged that they have more flexibility around when they can travel and subsequently would allow more time for their journeys, as required.

“It explains how they will minimise disruption and it won’t be as bad for people like us who don’t use the station for commuting.”

[Leisure User]

Journeys Starting / Ending at Birmingham New Street

These passengers have the fullest interaction with the station and they therefore recognised the extent to which their journeys could potentially be affected by the work. This group will need to be kept aware of changes to the entrances and exits to the station and any impact on access and egress modes will also be key in the context of their overall journeys. These passengers recognised that all aspects of the redevelopment could affect them and are therefore likely to require a comprehensive programme of communications.

“What about access to the station by bus and car and taxis. If it keeps changing and takes longer I will have to allow more time for my journey.”

[Business User]

Interchanging

The primary focus of those recruited as passengers who interchange at Birmingham New Street was the platform changes that will be a central feature of the redevelopment work. The commuters claimed to have low levels of interaction with the station but Business and Leisure Users were making more frequent use of the train-side facilities. Catering facilities and toilets are important for these passengers and it will therefore be important to bear their specific needs in mind.

“Forewarned is forearmed so they will need to keep platform changes as regulated as possible and tell us in advance when we will need to allow more time to get from one platform to another.”

[Business User]

3.3 Passenger Concerns and Needs

3.3.1 Passenger Priorities

Although on this occasion no disruption to services is anticipated, it is important not to underestimate the potential difficulties that are likely to be caused by platform changes, at least at a perceptual level among certain passenger groups.

Service Disruption

Many expressed concerns about services being delayed or cancelled and in this respect there were frequent references to problems that had been caused by severe weather conditions. Many were aware of the current problems that are caused by congestion outside the station in peak hours, which made it impossible to believe that this situation would not be exacerbated by having fewer platforms available. The majority assumed that there would be unavoidable problems over the course of the redevelopment timetable, even if these are unforeseen at the present time.

“It will make unforeseen problems worse in the five Autumns and Winters while the work is ongoing.”
[Business User]

Journey Disruption

This was widely anticipated to be more of a difficulty on this occasion due to the potential difficulties caused by platform changes at Birmingham New Street. Many users complained about access to platforms being inadequate at present and the bottlenecks that this often causes. Passengers were therefore worried that during the redevelopment work, this would cause them to miss trains and they were consequently already thinking about needing to allow longer for their journeys, even in the event of no disruption to services.

“It’s already a nightmare getting to and from the platforms so what will it be like when there are more people using fewer platforms during the work?”
[Business User]

3.3.2 Secondary Concerns

Although categorised as secondary level concerns, these both represent genuine areas of concern for passengers and may present a challenge for the industry to provide reassurance.

Overcrowding

A recent quantitative study conducted by Network Rail showed platform changes (21%) and overcrowding (19%) to be the main areas of concern among station users with the current station.² This project confirmed that overcrowding is considered to be a problem during peak times as users are aware that platforms struggle to cope with the volume of passengers waiting to board trains. Since this is reasonably expected to intensify as a result of platform closures, passengers were concerned about displacement that will be exacerbated by poor access to platforms, as explained above.

“You will need to know when your platform will have other people redirected to it because that will cause delays”

[Commuter]

Impact on Fares

This knee-jerk response was consistent across the sample and is a common reaction among passengers when exposed to project costing details during the course of this type of research exercise. On this occasion however, there was evidence to suggest that this was linked not only to the scale and duration of this project but also to the recession and the current economic climate. Many voiced concerns that fare increases would be inevitable during the redevelopment period and even if linked to inflation only it will be difficult for passengers to not create a link with the cost of the work at a perceptual level.

“It’s costing a boatload of dough, hundreds of millions of pounds and I don’t know who’s paying for it but we’ll end up paying somewhere down the line.”

[Leisure User]

² Birmingham New Street Redevelopment 2009; Network Rail; TNS research International

“It’s good to be spending that much but where is the money coming from? If it costs £600 million, fares will be going up.”
[Commuter]

3.3.3 Lower Importance Issues

These are issues that will be tolerated as part of the redevelopment process but may be necessary to address through passenger communications.

Station Access

This was related to the scale and phasing of the work so may not become an issue for most until 2012. The concern in this respect is the need for passengers to re-familiarise themselves with the station layout as entrances and exits are added or removed. This also has implications for access and egress modes, since local traffic congestion was expected to get worse during the redevelopment period.

“Having eight entrances will make it easier to get into the station but they will need to let us know which ones can be used while the work is happening.”
[Business User]

Ticket Purchasing

Since this can currently present problems for some users, buying tickets was expected to become more difficult in the event of needing to use temporary facilities. Most were unsure how or if they would be affected by this but hoped that multiple options and channels would be made available.

“I hope the bigger concourse will be for passengers and will make it easier to buy tickets rather than being just full of shops.”
[Business User]

Retail

This was a low interest area for most respondents who assumed that any outlets removed would be replaced in time. It was however hoped that temporary facilities would be available for purchasing travel essentials such as drinks, snacks and newspapers although most were aware of the options currently available close to the station.

“I expect that there will eventually be more shops and food outlets but what will happen to the places that will have to close while it is being built?”

[Commuter]

Car Parking

Only one or two respondents claimed to be currently using car-parking facilities at the station. The research process flagged this as a potential issue however, especially since no reference was made to alternative provision, this can be regarded as a research effect rather than a genuine concern. In reality, needing to know about the short-stay area and drop-off zone was of more interest to the majority of station users.

“Will there be extra car parking provided, especially since they are using some of the car park to build the new concourse. Parking in central Birmingham is already a nightmare.”

[Commuter]

3.3.4 Service and Infrastructure

Passengers' highest level concerns centred on service disruption. At a rational level, this equates to delays or cancellations, which will clearly affect (travel) plans and routines. At an emotional level this is manifest in feelings of anxiety and worrying about running late and the resulting problems this disruption may cause in personal or work related situations. As discussed, platform changes were seen as an integral part of what could amount to journey disruption even in the absence of service disruptions.

The passenger needs arising from these concerns will be the most challenging for the industry to meet during the redevelopment period as the key issue will be to attempt to maintain service reliability. During the research, passengers expressed their hope that an efficient information and communications campaign, making use of temporary signage where appropriate and relevant, would help allay these concerns.

Among the next highest level of concerns were the issues relating to overcrowding and navigating an unfamiliar environment. Some also expected that TOCs would be involved in the communications process

in order to allow the information campaign to be integrated across key project stakeholders. The most important issue in this respect from a passenger perspective will be to ensure that TOCs are used to provide service specific information on a day-to-day basis as needs arise. Passengers often referred to the need to have as much advance notice of significant developments likely to affect their movement around the station, ideally supplemented by maps and signage. Whether TOCs or other parties took responsibility for this was agreed to be irrelevant.

All other concerns identified through the research process can be regarded as minor in comparison and include access to and within the station, ticket purchasing, retail availability, car parking and passenger Health and Safety.

3.3.5 Information Needs

Based on passengers' responses during the research, the following approach is recommended to meet the needs of passenger information at three levels:



Level 1

Aims

To make passengers aware of the redevelopment programme and to get them involved, interested and enthusiastic. Since 45% in a recent survey³ had some awareness and given that all respondents in this

³ Birmingham New Street Redevelopment 2009; Network Rail; TNS research International

exercise expressed positive views, it should not be difficult to achieve these objectives.

Channels

In order to reach as many station users as possible, passengers suggested that this would include local and regional media with reference to www.newstreetnewstart.com for those who want to know more.

What do passengers want to know?

Most respondents were impressed by the scale of the project and investment and felt this was worth communicating as an integral element of the vision for Birmingham New Street station and the future benefits for users. Passengers also suggested that these messages would be enhanced if supported by the visuals of the finished project that had made a very positive impression when introduced during the research.

Level 2

Aims

To provide station users with an ongoing progress report focusing on practical implications for passengers. The purpose of these communications will be to facilitate journey planning during the course of the work in order to minimise the potential for passenger dissatisfaction.

Channels

Passengers expected that these would be centred around Birmingham New Street station and could include, for example, Point Of Sale channels (online, ticket office, on tickets) and include the TOCs servicing the station. There was also an appetite among passengers for specifically targeted media such as SMS alerts, posters, handouts and a visible staff presence.

What do passengers want to know?

Generally, what is happening at the station and how this will impact on them and their journeys. Specifically, important and relevant information such as platform closures and alternative routes around the station. Progress updates on the project timeline will also be welcomed.

Level 3

Aims

To address specific issues as they arise and the primary focus is likely to be platform changes. This will therefore amount to an ad-hoc communication of unforeseen events or problems in order to facilitate passenger journeys through the station. Clarity will be critical at this level.

Channels

These would necessarily be focused almost exclusively on Birmingham New Street station and would be likely to include instant response media such as information boards, monitors, staff, public address announcements and SMS alerts for those registered to receive them. Passengers also hoped that TOC liaison would help to ensure optimal coverage (e.g. at stations and on-trains).

What do passengers want to know?

Information provision would need to be responsive to specific needs as they arise, perhaps on a daily basis and would satisfy the requests made by passengers about where to get more details and updates. Apologies for inconvenience caused were not directly requested but nowadays are expected by regular train users as a minimum service standard.

The industry may also wish to consider the following practical steps:

- Provide more visible images of the end result at Birmingham New Street to make them unmissable for passengers using the station
- Set up an information point at Birmingham New Street staffed by people who are briefed on the project details
- Staff to hand out leaflets / details of the redevelopment to station users
- Offer facility to sign up for free travel updates
- Consider visible link to www.newstreetnewstart.co.uk where / when tickets are bought / issued

4. Conclusions & Recommendations

There was a common feeling among our sample of regular users of Birmingham New Street that the station compares unfavourably to other major stations and is therefore in need of redevelopment. Respondents felt that the station currently creates a poor impression of Birmingham for visitors arriving by train and would therefore benefit from modernisation and updating in keeping with the regeneration of the surrounding area.

Passengers were unaware of details of the proposed redevelopment programme but welcomed them when they were introduced during the course of the research. Some were surprised not to have already seen communications relating to the redevelopment, given the scale and importance of the project for the local area and due to the fact that there was some awareness that preparatory work had begun.

There was consistent evidence from this research to suggest that implications for the various user groups differ on this occasion from other projects conducted for Passenger Focus and Network Rail. In light of the phased approach that will be adopted, the challenge will be to ensure that communications are used to provide passengers with timely and efficient information about how the work will impact on their interaction with the station.

The highest priority issue for users of Birmingham New Street is the extent of disruption they are likely to face during the course of the work. Other issues are predominantly related to the need for passengers to re-orient and re-familiarise themselves with the radical changes that are accepted as unavoidable in delivering a completely new station in two phases.

Consequently, the way in which 'disruption' is defined on this occasion is of critical importance. Rather than relating only to timetable or service changes this instead means anything affecting journeys and station usage in a broader context. Platform changes are especially important in this respect since the current problems with access and overcrowding are expected to be exacerbated by the platform closures that are an integral element of the redevelopment work.

This broader definition of 'disruption' has important implications from a communications perspective. All user groups were resistant to being told that disruption would be kept to a minimum on exposure to visuals and details of what the redevelopment project comprises since this creates a credibility gap. The general consensus was that the communications content and tone needs to be more honest and realistic in this respect in order to minimise the risk of passenger dissatisfaction and alienation.

Nevertheless, the evidence from the research indicates that passenger needs should be relatively easy to meet.

Conclusions

This research indicates that the following suggestions should be adopted in order to develop effective passenger information around the redevelopment of Birmingham New Street station:

- **Avoid direct reference to the value of the project or allay concerns that this will be recovered through fare increases**
- **Consider structuring communications according to the three levels suggested in order to maximise the impact and efficiency of passenger information**
- **Provide Level 1 and 2 information at the earliest possible opportunity. Level 1 should be to create awareness and interest in the project and Level 2 should provide progress reports focusing on practical implications for passengers**
- **Work in collaboration with other stakeholders, especially Train Operating Companies, in order to fulfil passenger expectations that information and communications will be integrated throughout the redevelopment project**
- **The needs of disabled passengers are likely to be greater and ongoing contact with the relevant groups should be maintained throughout the regeneration.**

5. Appendix

5.1 Discussion Guide

Birmingham New Street Redevelopment Discussion Guide (90 minute Groups)

Context

- *[Moderator to explain that research is being conducted on behalf of Passenger Focus and Network Rail who wish to understand passengers' views, concerns and any experiences so far of the redevelopment of Birmingham New Street station to assist in effective passenger communication throughout the project]*
- *[Moderator to explain that feedback will help inform decisions taken, but that any views expressed will not necessarily be implemented]*

Introduction (5 mins)

- Explanation of nature and purpose of research
- Respondent introductions: name, age, occupation, nature of train journeys most frequently undertaken
- Brief warm-up exercise (as required)

Background and Journey Details (5 mins)

- Explore current travel preferences / patterns
- Explore rail journeys made by user group / segment
 - Local station used most often
 - Destination station(s) travelled to
 - Days & times of journeys typically made
 - How do you access New Street station from where your journey started?
 - What would be your preferred method to get to the station if given the choice?
 - What are your experiences of accessing New Street station from where your journey started?
- Which TOC(s) used for specific journeys
- Frequency / purpose of rail travel
- What role does rail travel play in current lifestyles
- Current extent of interaction with Birmingham New Street station

Birmingham New Street (10 mins)

- What do you think of Birmingham New Street station at the moment
- To what extent do you feel that it meets your needs as a user
- What are its main positives / strengths
- What are its main negatives weaknesses
- How well does it compare to other train stations that you use
- How well does the station perform in terms of:
 - Quality and variety of shops and places to eat
 - External appearance
 - Attractiveness of internal station environment
 - Overall travel experience for departing, arriving or changing trains
- To what extent do you consider the station to be:
 - Attractive and impressive
 - An example of good design
 - A landmark Birmingham can be proud of

Gateway Redevelopment Project (spontaneous) (5 mins)

- Are you aware of any plans to improve or re-develop Birmingham New Street station. Have you heard of the Gateway programme.
- What have you heard about what is going to happen. Where did you hear / see information relating to this
- What are your spontaneous attitudes / feelings about the programme.
- What are your primary information requirements at this stage. What are the key things you would like to know about the redevelopment work

Birmingham New Street Redevelopment (Introduce stimulus materials) (10 mins)

Moderator to outline the nature of the work to be undertaken at Birmingham New Street, the reasons why it is necessary, anticipated impact on train services, station facilities and the future benefits for rail users, as follows:

The Vision For New Street

- The £600m Gateway project will see New Street station transformed into a bright, modern, 21st century focal point for Birmingham. It will be exactly the kind of station passengers deserve, and will have a positive impact on the prosperity and perceptions of the city and the region.
- The design will see New Street station wrapped in shimmering, carefully crafted stainless steel and includes a giant light-filled atrium. This bold concept will deliver a better and brighter station for the millions of people who use New Street every year.

The aim is to give Birmingham a world-class station boasting highlights such as:

- Room for even more passengers to use the station in comfort
- More accessible, brighter and clearer platforms, reached by new escalators and new public lifts
- A grand concourse that is three and a half times bigger than at present and enclosed by a giant, light-filled atrium
- A stunning new station facade, adding to Birmingham's growing reputation for good design
- Eight pedestrian entrances giving better links to and through the station
- The stimulus for the physical regeneration of the areas surrounding the station leading to the potential creation of over 10,000 new jobs across the city

Full discussion of passenger issues and priorities (10 mins)

- What do you think about this, why. How different is it to what you were expecting. What do you think about the scale of the work planned.
- What are the positive outtakes from the redevelopment, how will the redevelopment benefit you in the future
- Do you have any reservations/issues with the redevelopment at Birmingham New Street, what are these?
- When do you expect the work to be conducted
- How would you like to be kept up to date with the progress of the work
- What are your key information requirements given what you know about the redevelopment at this stage

Gateway Images and Visuals (10 mins)

[Moderator to introduce visuals of the new station and show Fly Through and Walk Through films to give respondents an idea of how the station will look on completion]

- What are your first thoughts and impressions
- How do these images compare with what you were expecting
- How do they affect your views about the redevelopment

[Assess revised perceptions against evaluation criteria used in earlier exercise]:

- How well the redeveloped Birmingham New Street compare to other train stations that you use

Specific timeline and redevelopment areas at Birmingham New Street station

[Moderator to explain that the work will be conducted in two stages. This will not affect the running and timetable of services]

Redevelopment Timetable

- The project will be conducted in two phases:
- **Phase 1** will see a brand new station concourse built in a former car park next to the station. Preparatory work to prepare the site for the new concourse started in September 2009 with the closure of the car park. The new concourse is expected to open for use in **2012**.
- **Phase 2** will then see the old station concourse closed and redeveloped. The project is due to complete in **2015**, when passengers will enjoy three and a half times more space.

Disruption

- The work has been planned to allow passengers to continue to be able to catch trains as usual from New Street.
- Activity has been planned to ensure minimal impact on trains and passengers for the duration of the work so disruption will be kept to a minimum.
- All train services will continue to operate throughout the project and the Pallasades shopping centre will remain open.
- Only one platform will be taken out of service at any one time, so there may be platform changes from when work starts inside the station later this year until completion in 2015. In 2012, passengers will start to use the new concourse with additional entrances and the existing concourse will close for redevelopment. The walkway from the Bullring shopping centre into the Pallasades (currently used as a route to the station) will remain open throughout. On completion in 2015, the concourse areas will be joined and passengers will enjoy three and half times more space.

In the following sections, moderator to probe how respondents will be affected by the redevelopment work:

Passenger Concerns (5 mins)

- What concerns do you have about the way your journey / movement through Birmingham New Street will be affected by the redevelopment work
- To what extent will any of the redevelopment work affect the way you use the station. What are your key concerns, why. What are the secondary concerns, why
- Follow up on findings from quant to understand nature of concerns relating to platform changes and overcrowding
- How would passengers like to be communicated these concerns (i.e. platform changes, overcrowding etc)
- How could these concerns be allayed. What do you need to see, hear, read about that will minimise the impact of the redevelopment
- What do you expect Network Rail or other stakeholders to do in order to acknowledge and address your concerns
- How would they do this ideally?

Passenger Needs (5 mins)

[Moderator to use prioritisation of concerns from flipchart exercise in previous section to help respondents focus on key needs during redevelopment work]

- How would you prioritise your most urgent needs during the course of the reconstruction, why.
- What could the rail industry do to allay concerns over the next five years. How do you expect these needs to be met in terms of communications *[moderator to probe via visuals, through announcements etc]*
- What assistance would be provided in an ideal world, what do you realistically expect will be provided
- Thinking about your needs, what is the minimum that could be done to meet those needs. What would be the next step up. What would exceed your expectations
- What could the rail industry do to meet your needs in terms of offering realistic aid and information to you

Information Requirements and Communications (10 mins)

- What sort of information / communications would you like to see as the redevelopment takes place. What channels are preferred (eg at local station, on trains, at Birmingham New Street)
- How far in advance would you expect information to be available
- Have you heard of www.newstreetnewstart.co.uk What would you expect to find on the site. How likely would you be to use this as a source of information and to keep up to date with the redevelopment work.
- What media mix is anticipated / preferred / most effective (eg local papers / radio / TV / email / post)

Quick Wins (5 mins)

[Moderator to ask all respondents to suggest at least one idea that they would find helpful in relation to the redevelopment work]

- What could Network Rail and other stakeholders do in terms of communications in the immediate term that would make a real difference to passengers
- What tactical or small scale benefits would improve things and be appreciated
- Are there any specific information needs that you have ?
- What suggestions for improvement do you have for the optimal style of the comms

Communications / Creative Appraisal (5 mins)

[Moderator to introduce mock-ups of proposed materials]

- What do you think of these examples. What do you like/dislike about them.
- *Location:* Where would you expect the materials to be situated. Where would be best to have maximum impact. Where would you be most / least likely to take notice of them
- *Design:* How do you feel about this as a campaign style. What do you think of the visuals. How do they make you feel about the redevelopment work. Are they eye-catching and noticeable. Why/not. How clear is the headline / message font - colour, type and size
- *Headline:* What do you think about the headline. Would it catch your attention. Would it encourage you to read the copy. Why / why not
- To what extent do these communications meet any of the needs / expectations / concerns you talked about earlier
- What are the main priorities of the communications campaign for you. What role do the comms need to play. What do the materials need to communicate to you

Summary (5 mins)

- Summarise key output from session
- Overview of reactions to proposed redevelopment work
- What are key issues and concerns for passengers by user group
- How could the project stakeholders allay these concerns
- How will redevelopment impact on current perceptions of the station
- What are the key learnings to emerge from the session
- Key information requirements
- Key messages for Passenger Focus, Network Rail and stakeholders
- How to provide reassurance during the redevelopment work
- Are there any quick wins for the project stakeholders



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