Passenger information: a vision

Report for Passenger Focus and National Rail Enquiries

National Rail Enquiries

Passengerfocus
putting rail passengers first

Colin Foxall CBE

Introduction

Information is an important element of a successful journey by train, in some cases information is key to whether a journey is made by train at all. At times of unexpected disruption, keeping people informed about what is happening can be the difference between passengers in angry despair about "the railway" and resigned acceptance that from time to time things go wrong.

The National Passenger Survey tells us that, against an overall satisfaction level of 80%:

- 77% of passengers are satisfied with information at stations about trains times and platforms
- 65% of passengers are satisfied with information during the journey
- 34% of passengers are satisfied with the way delays are dealt with, of which information is an important part.

Furthermore, national research carried out by Passenger Focus in 2007 placed two elements of information ('passengers kept informed of delays' and 'Information on train times/platforms accurate and available') in the top 10 of priorities for improvement. There is clearly work to do.

Passenger Focus is delighted to have worked with National Rail Enquiries to understand passengers' views about a range of issues relating to information provision. This qualitative research, funded jointly by Passenger Focus and National Rail Enquiries, looked at:

- the problems rail passengers currently experience with information
- what rail passengers regard as 'good practice'
- given references in the July 2007 railways White Paper, passengers' views of National Rail Enquiries.
- passenger reaction to the draft rail industry vision for passenger information.

A summary of the findings is given in part 2 of this foreword.

Next steps for Passenger Focus

1 This research confirms our view that it is essential for the rail industry is to implement the Good Practice Guides on passenger information, as referred to in the recent National Audit Office report, as fully and as quickly as possible. Therefore, Passenger Focus will be working with each train company to ensure that these Guides are adopted quickly.

2 The Good Practice Guides completed so far cover information off stations, at stations, on trains and at times of planned engineering work. Through our membership of the industry Passenger Information Strategy Group, Passenger Focus will ensure that the impending Good Practice Guide on information at times of unplanned disruption to services is fit for purpose.

3 The rail industry's draft vision for passenger information was well-received by passengers, with only minor amendments made in the light of the research. Passenger Focus will be encouraging the industry to publicly adopt the vision and develop specific initiatives to achieve it.

4 In partnership with the rail industry, its funders and stakeholders Passenger Focus will stimulate debate about how a step change can be made to passengers' experiences at times of unplanned service disruption. Improving information is critical – but it must not be in isolation from tackling other issues. The time taken to agree a recovery plan, the level of contingency planning, the extent of train crew diversionary route knowledge and many other factors are equally important.

Colin Foxall CBE
Chairman
Passenger Focus

Guy Dangerfield

Key findings of the research

The MVA Consultancy report will speak for itself, however Passenger Focus wishes to highlight the following:

Passengers' reasonable expectations

Information should be:

- easily accessible to all, including free or easily affordable and quickly obtained
- clear and easy to understand
- accurate and up to date
- issued in a timely manner.

Information at times of disruption

Passengers expect to be provided with:

- timely information that identifies the extent of the interruption to services
- clear, relevant and trustworthy information on alternative travel options, including advice on alternative routes and/or bus service availability.

In particular, the need to improve the flow of relevant, up to date information to front-line staff, whether on stations or trains, was regarded as key.

The technological balance

This research gave a clear view that passengers want the option to ask a human being for the information they want, particularly at times of disruption. This was not an anti-technology point: passengers want a mix of face to face interaction with staff and availability of hi-tech systems, particularly involving text (SMS) services.

Meeting the needs of disabled passengers

Two areas of concern were highlighted by this research:

- a general lack of awareness amongst mobility, hearing and vision-impaired passengers of the services already available to help them plan and undertake journeys on the rail network
- albeit from a small sample, negative feedback about railway staff was reported by all disabled passengers interviewed.

Awareness of National Rail Enquiries

Two issues were highlighted:

- that while many passengers are using National Rail Enquiries services, most are not aware/not certain that they are
- that there is a lack of awareness of National Rail Enquiries products within the rail industry itself, including what services National Rail Enquiries can offer train companies free of (additional) charge.

The draft rail industry vision for passenger information

Passengers responded favourably to the draft vision, resulting in some minor modifications. The industry vision is discussed further in Part 3 of this foreword.

Comparing the draft vision with current experience

Overall, passengers felt that the industry is performing poorly against the proposed vision. Three areas were highlighted as a high priority for improvement – this was common amongst business, leisure and commuter passengers:

- improving access of railway staff to real time running and other up to date information
- improved information for passengers, especially at smaller stations, when engineering work is disrupting services
- improvements to how passengers are told that engineering work will disrupt future journeys.

Guy Dangerfield
Passenger Link Manager
Passenger Focus

National Rail Enquiries

Jason Durk

Delivering high quality passenger information is a priority for National Rail Enquiries.

We are determined to rise to the challenge set out in the White Paper that National Rail Enquiries "will provide a single source of comprehensive information about timetables, service disruption, real-time train running, fares, and facilities".

It is an essential first-step to ensure that the rail industry has a vision that is fit for purpose in the eyes of its passengers. We were therefore delighted to work in partnership with Passenger Focus to conduct research into passengers' information needs and current experiences, gain insight into attitudes towards National Rail Enquiries and get reaction to the industry's Vision for Passenger Information.

There are a number of key messages to digest and factor in to future plans; not least passengers' desire to use technology to access information, but not lose the human contact with staff that provides reassurance when things go wrong.

As a first step, the Association of Train Operating Companies will now work to formally adopt the industry's Vision for Passenger Information and follow it up with specific plans to ensure that:

"As an industry we will provide timely, relevant, accurate and consistent information – easily understandable and accessible wherever, whenever and however required – so that all passengers can make informed choices about their travel plans."

Jason Durk
Head of Information
National Rail Enquiries

Passenger Information Strategy Group

The Passenger Information Strategy Group comprises all train operators, Network Rail and Passenger Focus and its remit is to "facilitate the introduction and adoption of good practice initiatives in the area of information across the rail industry", something we achieve by defining good practice and influencing change within the industry. Adoption of the industry's vision for passenger information, which we fully support, will be a key milestone for the Group and follows our authorship of the Good Practice Guides on passenger information off station, at station, on train and at times of planned engineering work. The value of an overarching vision, encapsulating where the industry wants to be with the provision of passenger information, was identified by the Group and we developed the draft text tested in this research. The Group will now champion adoption of the Good Practice Guides and will consider what further initiatives are required to ensure that the industry 'lives' the vision it has developed.

Kelly Jennings

Kelly Jennings
Chair
Passenger Information Strategy Group

Positively Affecting Lives

Qualitative Research into Passengers' views and opinions about passenger information in the rail industry

Report for Passenger Focus and National Rail Enquiries

April 2008

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Summary

Objectives and Methodology

Passenger Focus, in a joint project with National Rail Enquiries, commissioned MVA Consultancy to undertake qualitative research into passengers' views and opinions about passenger information in the rail industry. The aims of the research were to:

- understand the existing problems passengers encounter, both when train services are running normally and when there is disruption – planned and unplanned;
- understand what passengers regard as 'good practice' with regards to information provision, both when train services are running normally and when there is disruption – planned and unplanned;
- understand passengers' reaction to the draft rail industry Vision for the provision of passenger information (hereafter "the draft Vision");
- articulate whether there are gaps between the industry's ideas for delivering the Vision and passengers' views/aspirations;
- offer alternative Visions, if appropriate, and explain why these are offered; and
- understand how the National Rail Enquiries brand is viewed by passengers.

A total of eight focus groups (involving a total of 67 passengers) were undertaken with a range of commuter, business and leisure passengers. The groups were undertaken in London, Leeds, Glasgow and Cardiff and covered an appropriate mix of age groups, gender and ethnic diversity. In addition, six depth interviews were conducted to understand the issues of mobility, vision or hearing impaired passengers.

Main findings

Passengers identified a range of information requirements which were considered 'essential', on the basis that if the rail industry failed to deliver the required information satisfactorily it would be difficult or impossible to plan or undertake a journey. These were categorised within four distinct stages of their journey and included:

Planning stage

- times of trains, fares, possibility of experiencing delays or changes to their journey;
- additional less critical information at the journey planning stage includes likely level of crowding.

At the station

- platform information for arriving/departing trains, expected (as well as scheduled) time of arrival of trains, details of train formation (including number of carriages, particularly if reduced), the location of specific carriages and the facilities on-board the train;
- any delays/cancellations, with alternatives (routes, modes) in the event of significant delay.

On-train

- any delays, with implications for connections.

Post-Journey

- return journey times and local transport connections for the ongoing journey stage.

The research identified that passengers expect that all relevant information should be easily accessible to all passengers. This included being free or easily affordable, easily and quickly obtained, clear and easily understood, accurate, up to date, and issued promptly (when requested) or in a timely manner. The majority of information at the planning stage is accessed through telephone services and websites. Passengers' choice of media is based on what they are most familiar with using, or find most convenient.

Overall the research found that the information provided by the rail industry across all media is generally considered good, accurate and reliable. However, many passengers had occasional experiences of problems, especially during times of disruption, either planned or unplanned. During such instances they expect to be provided with timely information that identifies the extent of the interruption and clear, relevant and trustworthy information on alternative travel options.

A key finding of the research was that staff presence at stations and on trains is considered an extremely important medium for delivering information. The ability to communicate with staff face–to–face is often considered essential, especially at times of unplanned disruption, when staff can provide considerable reassurance in confusing and fast-changing situations. Moreover, there was a view that 'traditional' staff-centred information and more 'hi tech' channels are complementary. However, there is a strong demand from passengers, and enthusiasm for, improvements and innovations in information delivery based on technological developments, especially through text (SMS) services.

There is a significant concern amongst passengers that staff often do not appear to have access to up-to date information. The industry acknowledged that more needs to be done in this area, especially in the first hour of unplanned disruption.

There is a lack of awareness by mobility, hearing and visually impaired passengers of what information is available when planning the journey. This lack of knowledge creates frustration and a lack of confidence. Amongst the mobility, hearing and visually-impaired passengers we spoke to there was a clear aspiration to have a central portal for accessing information and booking service for disabled passengers. The research found a high number of instances where negative experiences were reported with staff customer service. It is important therefore that all customer-facing staff (including both station and call centre staff) should receive a consistent high–standard of 'disability awareness' training and refresher courses.

Although there is a high level of use of National Rail Enquiries through its website and telephone service, many users do not refer to "National Rail Enquiries" services by name, and the National Rail Enquiries brand lacks immediate recognition and identity.

Our research found that the draft Vision captured the key concepts and words, is easily understood and was very well received by passengers. There was some concern that the draft Vision seemed to emphasise 'hi tech' information systems as opposed to 'traditional' face-to-face methods and in particular, the information-providing role of rail staff. Although there was a level of scepticism that the draft Vision was 'good in practice', but in reality

'difficult to achieve', this was due to a lack of confidence in the rail industry due to poor experiences of using rail services in general. For the draft Vision to be realised the rail industry will need to work hard to overcome this barrier.

In contrast with passengers' initial "generally good, accurate and reliable" assessment, when asked about passenger information in the context of the draft Vision, on the whole the view was that the industry is performing poorly. The research suggests that no particular element of information was considered a low priority for improvement. The three information requirements that were deemed a high priority for improvement that were universal across all focus groups included:

- access of staff to real time information;
- information at smaller stations when engineering work is disrupting services; and
- how passengers are told that engineering work will disrupt future journeys.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research we recommend that National Rail Enquiries and Passenger Focus with rail industry partners consider how to:

- raise passenger awareness of available sources of information and improve understanding of what each offers;
- in particular communicate the benefits of TrainTracker text (SMS) and reassure customers of its cost – National Rail Enquiries could consider a one month free trial period;
- provide better information for mobility, hearing and visually impaired passengers; this might involve additional disability awareness training for staff;
- improve information provision to staff at times of service disruption, including on alternatives available to passengers (route and mode);
- exploit the future opportunities for innovation, while satisfying the continuing demand for more traditional staff-centred customer information services.
- encourage train operating companies to undertake additional complementary marketing and branding of National Rail Enquiries and its services (this could include marketing through station information points, help points, screens, announcements etc);
- ensure that the ATOC/NRES Good Practice Guides adequately cover the question of information to passengers during the first hour of an unplanned disruption, including 'holding' messages and the transfer of information from one TOC/station to another.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Passenger Focus, in a joint project with National Rail Enquiries, commissioned MVA Consultancy in January 2008 to carry out a research project to undertake qualitative research into passengers' views and opinions about passenger information in the rail industry.

1.1.2 The July 2007 White Paper 'Delivering a Sustainable Railway' identified a number of improvements in information provision, including a growing demand and expectation for improvements from passengers pertaining to information provision. The White Paper identified that:

- call centres provide a faster and more accurate service and a wider range of information than previously with British Rail;
- real-time journey information can now be accessed by internet or mobile phone; and
- the Government's Transport Direct website allows door-to-door planning of journeys by different modes, including risks of delay from roadworks or rail maintenance; however,
- passengers will continue to expect accurate and constantly updated real-time information, as well as making the most of the opportunities that new technologies provide to enable them to access information and buy tickets in ways and places that suit them, rather than at the end of a queue.

1.1.3 The White Paper stated that the Government intends to focus the standards (of information across the rail network) around the National Rail Enquiry Service. It also referred to the intention for National Rail Enquiries to provide a single source of comprehensive information about timetables, service disruption, real–time running, fares and facilities.

1.1.4 The rail industry Passenger Information Strategy Group developed a draft Vision for the provision of passenger information in response to the White Paper. The draft Vision is:

"To provide timely, relevant, accurate and consistent information – easily accessible through all media wherever and whenever required – so that passengers are able to make informed choices about their travel plans".

1.2 Study Objectives

1.2.1 The study objectives were to:

- understand the existing problems passengers encounter, both when train services are running normally and when there is disruption – planned and unplanned;
- understand what passengers regard as 'good practice' with regards to information provision, both when train services are running normally and when there is disruption – planned and unplanned;

- understand passengers' reaction to the draft rail industry Vision for the provision of passenger information;
- articulate whether there are gaps between the industry's ideas for delivering the Vision and passengers' views/aspirations;
- offer alternative Visions, if appropriate, and explain why these are offered; and
- understand how the National Rail Enquiries brand is viewed by passengers.

1.2.2 The research included a series of focus groups with a cross-section of passengers, depth interviews with passengers who have mobility, hearing and visual impairments, and a workshop involving representatives of the rail industry.

1.2.3 Passengers were invited to consider the various types of information currently available and their experiences in accessing and using information, at different stages in their journeys, in respect of aspects such as information quality, relevance, effectiveness and consistency. The research explored passengers' awareness of National Rail Enquiries services, their perceptions of National Rail Enquiries as a brand, and responses to the draft Vision. An important requirement for the research was to identify any disparities between the draft Vision, and the views/aspirations of passengers, since these could potentially lead to a recommendation for an alternative Vision to be adopted.

1.3 Structure of Report

1.3.1 Details of the study methodology are provided in Chapter 2. The subsequent sections set out the study findings, under the following main headings:

- passengers' information requirements and how passengers currently access information and their preferred sources/channels (Chapter 3);
- problems and frustrations that passengers currently encounter (Chapter 4);
- information requirements at times of planned and unplanned disruption (Chapter 5);
- passengers' awareness of and perception of National Rail Enquiries (Chapter 6);
- opinions of the draft Vision and views on the industry's current performance and priorities for improvement (Chapter 7);
- information requirements for mobility, hearing and visually impaired passengers (Chapter 8);
- the industry's view on information provision; and
- conclusions and recommendations (Chapter 10).

1.3.2 The Appendix to this report includes the discussion guide for the focus groups (including the stimulus material).

2 Methodology

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 In order to meet the objectives of the study a programme of qualitative research, including focus groups, depth interviews and a workshop with representatives from the industry, was undertaken.

Focus groups

2.1.2 A total of eight focus groups (involving a total of 67 passengers) were undertaken. The benefit of undertaking focus groups is that they enabled us to assess attitudes, beliefs, experiences and reactions to existing and proposed information provision and test views on the draft Vision in greater detail than a quantitative study.

2.1.3 The location and make–up of the groups was as shown below. The recruitment process was designed to ensure that passengers using both 'well performing' and 'poorly performing' train operating companies[1] were equally represented, and that those participating in each group covered an appropriate mix of age groups, gender and ethnic diversity:

- Group A - London. London and South East leisure passengers using South West Trains travelling off-peak – (recruited at London Waterloo);
- Group B - London. London and South East commuters using 'one', since renamed National Express East Anglia, travelling in the peaks – (recruited at London Liverpool Street);
- Group C - Leeds. Regional leisure passengers travelling short distances (i.e. under approximately 25 miles) off-peak to/from Leeds using any train operator – (recruited at Leeds);
- Group D - Leeds. Long distance (i.e. over approximately 100 miles/2 hours journey) business passengers travelling at any time using any train operator – (recruited at Leeds);
- Group E - Glasgow. Regional commuters (users of the Strathclyde network) travelling in the peaks using First ScotRail – (recruited at Glasgow Central);
- Group F - Glasgow. Off-peak passengers (either business or leisure) travelling between Edinburgh and Glasgow Queen Street – (recruited at Glasgow Queen Street);
- Group G - Cardiff. Long distance (i.e. over approximately 100 miles/2 hours journey) leisure passengers travelling off-peak to/from South Wales using any train operator – (recruited at Cardiff Central); and
- Group H - Cardiff. Commuters travelling on the Valleys network – (recruited at Cardiff Central).

2.1.4 The groups thus provided a good basis for exploring the needs and expectations of a cross-section of rail passengers that can be considered broadly representative of the national position, in terms of passenger characteristics and experiences.

[1] In terms of National Passenger Survey overall satisfaction scores

2.1.5 Specialist qualitative recruiters carried out respondent recruitment at designated rail stations (with permission of the relevant train operating company). Recruitment was conducted using a recruitment questionnaire developed by MVA in discussion with Passenger Focus, which ensured that respondents recruited for each group matched the recruitment criteria precisely. We also undertook measures to ensure that 'professional participants' (anyone who has taken part in a previous focus group, on any topic, more than once in the previous twelve months) were excluded.

2.1.6 Participants were offered a cash incentive (in line with current market rates for focus groups of this length in central locations) to ensure a representative selection of passengers participated in the groups. All groups were held in the evening and lasted approximately one and half hours.

2.1.7 A discussion guide was developed in consultation with Passenger Focus and National Rail Enquiries. The guide was designed to explore all stages in passengers' journeys from planning to completion. The key issues covered included:

- use of rail (i.e. frequency, types of journey, train operating companies used);
- how passengers currently access information;
- information requirements and needs;
- current and preferred information sources/services/products;
- views of National Rail Enquiries;
- views on the draft rail Vision; and
- current performance and priorities for improvements.

2.1.8 Appendix A includes the discussion guide and associated stimulus material.

2.2 Depth interviews

2.2.1 It was considered that the needs and concerns were likely to be different with mobility, vision or hearing impaired passengers. Therefore, individual depth interviews were conducted with mobility, vision or hearing impaired passengers who make journeys on the railway in order to obtain their views. Depth interviews were preferred to focus groups as they allowed the specific issues (relevant to their particular impairment) to be explored in greater detail.

2.2.2 For this study interviews were undertaken with:

- two mobility impaired passengers (both wheelchair users);
- two visually impaired passengers; and
- one profoundly deaf passenger.

2.2.3 In addition, an interview was conducted with the Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee which advises Government about access to transport for disabled people.

3 Information requirements and products/ services

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 In order to understand what information is important to passengers during each stage of their journey we asked participants to identify what information they need, or would like to have, to undertake their journey. Table 3.1 below summarises the information requirements for all of the groups.

Table 3.1 Information Requirements

Stage of Journey	Information Requirements
Before the journey	Planned engineering works, any delays or cancelations, fastest direct route (i.e. minimum changes), times of trains, fares (i.e. price and cost), whether school children will be on board, possible to book a seat?, offers/promotions, buffet on board and food at station?, baby facilities?, other facilities (i.e. phone chargers) on trains?, duration of journey, passenger experiences of journey, whether train is likely to be congested, whether station is open, potential problems with facilities at station (i.e. air conditioning, toilets), pets can travel?, parking at station?, disabled facilities at station and on train?, carriage of bikes on train?, whether direct train (how many stops)?, definitions of off-peak times.
At the station	Platform arrival number, final destination on information boards (as well as on tickets purchased), staff presence on platform, delays to train/train on time, reasons for delays, signs to booking office, where carriage will stop, how many carriages (i.e. likelihood of congestion)?, if carriage shortage, information on up-keep of train, whether guard on train, whether train will split (and what carriage to be in), estimated time of arrival (ETA), sufficient time for platform changes?, reassurance trains are on time, visual screens displaying accurate real time information, audio announcements clear and accurate, location of quiet coach if available, if problems with toilets on train and at station, can purchase ticket at station/on train?, fares updates (posters), location for secure bicycle storage, information on alternative routes (at times of disruption), location of trolleys for luggage.
On the train	Journey time, information on toilets (if working ok), whether buffet/trolley services on board, what facilities are on board (i.e. charges for phones), honest information about delays, clear announcements, estimated time of arrival (ETA), connection information (i.e. are there problems with other lines), timetable information, driver announcements providing reassurance that all ok, location of first aid equipment, information on taxis, buses etc at destination station(s), engineering works affecting connecting journeys (or return journey), suggestions on time of travel, multimedia screens (i.e. news and travel information), where there is available seating, information on other routes (i.e. how other services are operating), next stop announcements, which side of the train to (prepare to) get out of
After journey	Return journey times, last train posters, time of last service, information at station on storage/lost property, sufficient exit signage, information on taxis and buses and other interchange services, local maps.

3.2 Information requirements

3.2.1 There was considerable overlap between the information requirements of passengers at the planning stage of the journey and their requirements once they arrived at the station. In addition, most of the requirements were consistent across all the groups (i.e. leisure, business and commuters).

Before the journey

3.2.2 Many information requirements were identified for the planning stage of the journey. Those that were initially identified by most groups included information on aspects such as: times of trains, cost of fares, whether a direct route was possible and whether there was a chance of experiencing delays or changes to their journey due to planned engineering works. Other requirements, usually identified after further discussion, included having information on special promotions and offers, whether it is possible to book a seat and a desire to be informed of likely congestion on a specific train.

At the station

3.2.3 Much of the information that passengers require at the journey planning stage is also important at the stage when they arrive at the station to begin their journey. Information that is sought out at both stages includes (confirmation of) the times of trains, the cost of fares (if not already purchased) and/or validity of tickets, journey times and any current delays. However, several 'essential' information requirements identified by all groups apply specifically to the at-station stage of journeys. These included: platform information for arriving/departing trains, estimated (as well as scheduled) time of arrival of train, details of train formation (including number of carriages, particularly if reduced), the location of specific carriages such as buffet and any quiet or family carriages and whether the train is in reverse formation. It is at this stage of the journey that passengers (especially business and leisure) often express a strong desire for staff presence, particularly to check or confirm the information on indicator boards before committing to board a train. Staff are often assumed to be aware of the latest available information, and may be sought out by passengers who want updates or reassurance on whether trains are running to schedule, and advice on alternative travel options at times of disruption.

On train

3.2.4 Once on the train, a new set of information requirements applies. As discussed in the 'at station' stage, there was a strong emphasis on the need to be aware whether the train will arrive when expected or be late, and many passengers like to have ongoing updates about whether the train is running to schedule or about problems that could impact on connecting journeys. Information on the absence of problems ('the train is running to schedule') is important as confirmation or reassurance. The other main category of 'essential' on-train information included the availability and working status of facilities; for example, the location and status of toilets, availability and location of buffet services and power charging points. Finally, information on taxis and buses at destination stations were considered important.

After journey

3.2.5 The majority of groups did not, initially, consider information 'after the journey' to be important. However, after further consideration a number of important or desirable information requirements were acknowledged. These included information on: return

journey times, times of last trains that evening, and information on taxis and buses and other interchange services. Other information requirements that were considered important included clear and appropriate exit signage and access to local maps.

3.2.6 Participants were then asked to indicate which of the information requirements identified they considered to be 'essential' for making their journey, and which were 'nice to have'. Most of the requirements considered 'essential' can be classified under central themes such as station information, train information, times, facilities and staff. Table 3.2 outlines these 'essential' information requirements. As mentioned above, most of the requirements were consistent across all the groups, however, some were more important to particular groups or categories of passenger, and these are identified in the table.[2]

Table 3.2 Essential Information Requirements

Information requirements
Station information **-** platform departure number, information on alternative routes (at times of disruption), honest information about delays, clear and accurate audio announcements, visual screens displaying accurate real time information, information on where carriage will stop and the number of carriages (i.e. likelihood of congestion) **L/B** - information on taxis and buses and other interchange services
Train information – clear and accurate audio announcements, visual screens displaying accurate real time information, estimated time of arrival (ETA), next stop announcements **L/B** – connection information while on train (i.e. are there problems with other lines), whether train will split (and what carriage to be in), reassurance trains are on time, final destination **L** – information at stations on return journey times, information on other routes (i.e. how other services are operating)
Train times **–** times of trains, departure and arrival time, accurate timetable information **L/B** - duration of journey
Facilities **-** potential problems with facilities at station or on train (i.e. air conditioning, heating, toilets)
Staff **-** staff presence on platform and train, staff to provide reassurance at all stages of the journey Other **–** cost of fares, information on delays/cancellations, disabled facilities at station and on train, location of first aid/exit points on train, availability of car parking at station **L/B** - planned engineering works (especially those affecting connecting journeys or return journey), other facilities (i.e. phone charges, baby changing facilities) on trains **L** - carriage of bicycles, fastest direct route (i.e. minimum changes/stops) **Key: (B) – business passengers, (L) – leisure passengers, (L/B) – leisure and business passengers**

[2] Please note that in all commuter groups all of the information requirements outlined in Table 3.2 were mentioned. However, there were particular information requirements that were strongly voiced by leisure and business passengers.

4 Accessing Information

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Participants identified how they currently access information at all stages of their journey. Table 4.1 below identifies the channels (services/products) they said they currently use to access information. We also asked participants for examples of how they would like to receive information in the future – these are identified in bold.

Table 4.1 How passengers currently access information and how they would like to receive information in future.

Stage of Journey	Channels (services/products)
Before the journey	Internet websites (National Rail Enquiries and train operating companies), printed timetables (pocket and posters), telephone, ticket office, friends/family (word of mouth), posters at stations, teletext, radio travel news updates, news channels, **text (SMS), WAP**
At the station	announcements, visual information boards, ticket office, help points, staff, **text (SMS), bluetooth**
On the train	announcements, visual information (scrolling screens), printed diagrams near window, staff (guard and driver), own observations, (i.e. which station/landmarks passed) **WiFi**
After journey	contact centre/phone line, announcements, visual information, exit, signage, internet, **information on the ticket**

4.2 Before the journey

4.2.1 The majority of participants at the planning stage of their journey access information either through telephone services or the internet. Those who used the telephone to access information did so mainly because they did not have access to the internet at home or they preferred to have personal contact with an operator. Although users of both services said their choice was based on what they were most familiar with using, or found most convenient, website users tended also to believe that this should be the more reliable channel as it eliminates risk of human error arising in telephone enquiries. Some respondents referred to confusions experienced in telephone enquiries. For example, one respondent commented that he 'did not trust' the information from the staff at the National Rail Enquiries telephone service, commenting that he would frequently call more than once to seek confirmation that the fare that he had been given was correct.

"If the fare seemed high then I would call back, that's why I prefer the internet now" (Cardiff leisure passenger)

"The internet is often more reliable than getting information from the station staff' (Leeds business passenger)

"I find the National Rail Enquiries website useful because you find out how many stops and if you need to make changes" (London leisure passenger)

"With the website you don't have to wait for automated messages, it is straight there and then" (London commuter)

"You can queue jump, so you don't spend ages waiting in line at the station and you can get a range of information and take your time without thinking that you are holding up a whole queue of people waiting for a ticket for today" (Leeds business passenger)

"I like it that you get information on delays, it is real time" (London commuter)

"I like it how the internet is up to date and if the service is going to be late it will tell you" (Cardiff leisure passenger)

"I don't have access to the internet at home" (London commuter)

"I am a technophobe so I use the phone because I want to speak to someone" (London leisure passenger)

"I just prefer to speak to someone…rather than speaking to a computer" (London commuter)

"There are so many fares, I need to speak to someone" (Cardiff commuter)

4.2.2 A number of participants who used automated telephone services nevertheless expressed concern with aspects of using them.

"Everything is going automated on the telephone and it feels like you need a PHD to use the phone, it's an absolute nightmare" (Cardiff commuter)

"You try and ring these people and you get an automated answer machine and you end up going around in circles" (Cardiff commuter)

4.2.3 Approximately half the participants said they use the National Rail Enquiries telephone service or website. Of the remaining half, at least two thirds were not sure which service they were using. The third that were more aware mostly use their local train operator's website or telephone service – the reason being that the majority believed that their TOC's information should be more up to date and accurate. In addition, they could search for discounts and promotions. Examples of websites referred to by name were South West Trains (SWT), Virgin and TfL's Journey Planner.

"I use SWT's website as it has the live times" (London leisure passenger)

"I have got a BR transport number that I call" (London commuter)

"I just call my local station" (London commuter)

4.2.4 The participants generally thought the quality of information available to them is reasonably good. However, some also said that if they have planned or booked a journey in advance through the internet they will always seek confirmation or assurance nearer the time of the journey, either through calling or checking information at the station via the information screens or by seeking out staff.

4.2.5 Some leisure travellers said they typically travel to the station in order to plan a future journey to a given destination, to talk to staff and seek advice on the best option, particularly to discuss ticket options/prices at different times.

4.2.6 Pocket timetables are considered to be another useful information source when planning journeys on a local route, as these are simple, quick and convenient to use. However, pocket timetables were perceived by some to be often out of date and potentially confusing.

"I prefer talking to people, if I am not in a rush I will go down to the station and talk to someone or look through a timetable, so far I have not been let down" (London leisure passenger)

"I just go into the station if I want to find out information…it's not so much that I'm a technophobe as just old fashioned. I go down probably a week or so before the journey to plan it out and then also ring the station to check the train times an hour or so before the journey" (Leeds leisure passenger)

"I always listen out for the delays on the radio on the day of my journey" (London leisure passenger)

"I find it hard reading the timetables, I find them very confusing" (Glasgow off-peak passenger)

"The television channels have information about train times" (Leeds business passenger)

4.2.7 A number of participants who were unaware of National Rail Enquiries' TrainTracker text (SMS) service, and train operators' text (SMS) services, stated that in the future they would like to receive a text (SMS) message that provides information on their journeys, in particular any delays that may occur. In addition, some respondents wanted to see more use of WAP services.

4.3 At the station

4.3.1 Information 'at the station' is largely obtained through three media; visual screens and signs, audio announcements and talking to staff. Generally, the information provided through these media was considered accurate and reliable. Participants often would initially use the visual screens or station timetable posters to obtain information, and make their own assessment whether they needed additional information, which might mean seeking a station staff member. There was less emphasis on audio announcements as a direct source of information. Passengers can be very concerned that announcements (in contrast with visual displays) are brief, intermittent and not necessarily clear or comprehensible. The risk of 'missing' important audio announcements can create anxiety.

4.3.2 Talking to staff was considered a very important source as they can provide reassurance which was considered to be valuable and comforting, especially at times of disruption. However, some participants expressed concern that staff often don't have the most recent information, especially at times of disruption.

"I can't be bothered looking at signs I just go straight to the information desk" (London commuter)

"The signs in the station are quite good, they are usually quite clear" (Glasgow off-peak passenger)

"There are plenty of boards, I think if you were a stranger you would find your way around" (Glasgow off-peak passenger)

"Leeds isn't as good as it used to be but the old timetables printed out on the boards and hung up were really useful for when you were on the platform" (Leeds leisure passenger)

4.3.3 Some participants reiterated their earlier point that it would be useful if information concerning their journey could be provided by text (SMS) while at the station. One participant commented that a Bluetooth service should be made available which would allow passengers to access information conveniently through their mobile phones.

4.4 On the train

4.4.1 When on the train, most participants expect to access information through on-board visual screens, audio announcements, and some will also take up any opportunity to check or confirm journey details (such as their arrival time) by asking staff. Participants generally placed less emphasis on information (when services are running to schedule) during this stage of their journey. Many commented that once the journey begins they had little control over events. Of the different stages of the journey, many commented that there is a lack of information and that they need to rely on the visual screens and the driver's or guard's announcements. Moreover, some participants felt there was a lack of honest explanation for problems occurring, especially delays.

"When you are on the train I find that communication is very poor…they make up excuses as to why there are delays" (London commuter)

"To be fair there isn't a lot of information available on the train regards the journey, there are the neon signs but once you leave the first station it's hard to know which you ones have already passed" (Leeds leisure passenger)

"I'll always ask at the station and on board on the train" (Leeds leisure passenger)

4.4.2 Participants reaffirmed their view that it would be useful to be provided information directly to their mobile phones and others stated that they would use WiFi if it was made available.

4.5 After the journey

4.5.1 As indicated in section 3.2.5, most participants initially did not consider information 'after the journey' to be important and hence did not provide many examples of how information is currently accessed. There was a mixed response in terms of the quality of the information, with some stating that it was good while others considering it very poor. This appeared to be predominantly based on whether the participant was familiar with the station or not. Consequently those who were not familiar and less confident were reliant on using visual signage, accessing local maps and seeking staff assistance.

"If you don't know where you're going…sometimes it's murder." (Glasgow off-peak passenger)

"The signs in the station are quite good, they are usually quite clear" (Leeds business passenger)

4.6 Commuter, leisure and business comparisons

4.6.1 A number of commuters commented that because they were commuting and making regular journeys there was not a great need for information. Many stated that, generally, they do not look at train timetables, except when new timetables are introduced, as their frequent use and local knowledge of the service makes timetables unnecessary. However, most commented that if they were travelling during the weekend, they are more likely to check the internet for problems/times.

"I get the train every day, so my train times never alter" (Cardiff commuter)

"I know everything about my journey, don't really need information" (Cardiff commuter)

"I don't usually look at posters…I kind of know the times of my trains"(Glasgow commuter)

4.6.2 In contrast leisure and business travellers, who are of course much more likely to make relatively infrequent, unfamiliar and often 'one-off' journeys, place much higher importance on having clear, reliable information at the 'planning' and 'after-journey' stages.

5 Problems and frustrations experienced

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 The problems and frustrations identified by participants in accessing information and the quality of information received fell into three broad areas. These are:

- availability and accuracy of information;
- unhelpful staff at station and on telephone; and
- understanding the information that is provided.

Availability and accuracy of information

5.1.2 Participants expressed frustration when information is not available in the station environment. For example, *"not knowing if a carriage is missing" or when "the screens don't work" (London commuter).*

"If that board is not working, how long do I wait before I know if the train is not coming...especially late in the evenings" (Cardiff commuter)

"If it's not the staff being unhelpful, it's the monitors not working or something else" (London commuter)

5.1.3 Although some participants believed that National Rail Enquiries and some train operating company websites provide 'real time' information, there was considerable uncertainty about how up-to-date, and therefore accurate, the current systems are. A number of participants had experienced problems of apparently out of date information being posted on websites, and some who are not regular uses expressed doubt about speed of updating, and distrust about the accuracy of the website. Some believed that train operating company websites would be more up-to-date than National Rail Enquiries, especially in respect of service disruptions.

"The internet is not updated live, so if there is any type of interruption because of engineering or signalling failure, so that's been a problem before for me" (Cardiff commuter)

5.1.4 Other frustrations can arise at the website interface, with some passengers feeling web pages are often cluttered and generally not user friendly. It was not clear, however, which websites were particularly associated with these concerns.

Unhelpful staff at station, on train and on telephone

5.1.5 On the whole most participants thought that staff who deal with passenger enquiries, whether by phone, at the station or on train, provided a generally good customer service in delivering information. However, bad experiences seem to leave a lasting poor impression. A high proportion of respondents cited examples of where staff were rude and/or unhelpful. There was no one environment (i.e. station, train or telephone) in which problems had reportedly been experienced more often.

"Some guards can be quite unhelpful" (London commuter)

"I used to find the telephone was a good way to get information but the last time I used it I had such great problems, the lady was so rude and unhelpful. Ever since then I have gone to the station to buy the ticket rather or use the internet" (Leeds business passenger).

Understanding the information that is provided

5.1.6 Some participants said that they could not understand some sources of rail service information, in particular printed timetables (either poster or pocket timetables) seem to cause problems for a minority of passengers.

"I don't understand the printed timetables…I find them confusing" (London commuter)

5.1.7 Other, more specific areas of poor understanding or confusion included the meaning of phrases such as 'weekday' and 'off-peak', in relation to ticket use restrictions. Some passengers said the meanings can vary, and it was felt that there should be clear, consistent definitions of what is classed as peak and off-peak so that people know what trains they can and can't use.

5.1.8 Some respondents expressed frustration with some automated telephone services that they had used, probably referring to pre-recorded information available from some train operating companies.

"It's just someone on the other end of the line reading through a load of timetables. I did it once but never again" (Leeds business passenger)

5.1.9 Finally a few respondents commented that they had experienced difficulty understanding some operators in the National Rail Enquiries call centre.

"They give you too much information sometimes."(Glasgow off-peak passengers)

Honest information

5.1.10 Participants commented that many of the frustrations and problems caused by service disruptions could be reduced by the prompt provision of 'honest' explanations and information. Conversely, if too little or cursory information is provided, frustration and distrust can be generated. Some participants referred to exemplary experiences where staff had communicated unwelcome information efficiently and with an element of humour – when appropriate, this was considered to be a constructive way of relieving tension while providing information.

"Information needs to be honest, a lot of the time they make excuses…I don't believe them when they tell me if it is a signal failure" (London commuter)

"Honesty and humour can relieve the tension" (London commuter)

5.2 Information requirements during times of disruption

5.2.1 Participants stated that at times of disruption, either planned or unplanned, they should be provided with timely information that identifies the extent of the interruption and reliable information about alternative arrangements, routes or modes.

Planned disruptions

5.2.2 It was explained that 'planned disruptions' refer to events such as engineering works, which may involve line closures and bus replacements, etc., that have been planned in advance. Passengers expect that when the train operators are aware of these disruptions, which by definition they will be, they have a clear responsibility to inform passengers of them – with sufficient advance notice, and clear information on the rail service disruptions and any alternative travel options, including advice on alternative routes and/or bus services available.

5.2.3 As well as emphasising that they would want to know as soon as possible of any planned disruption, some stated that this information should be made available at the point of purchase, and that tickets should not be sold without informing potential passengers of the planned disruption.

"I would like to know how long the disruption was going to last for…and if there would be alternative transport available" (Glasgow commuter)

5.2.4 Participants said that they were informed of planned disruptions through station posters, website information, media and through word of mouth. A few said that they received information through leaflets for long term disruption.

5.2.5 Once informed of the planned disruption, most participants said that they would use the internet, telephone services or route maps to investigate whether an alternative journey was feasible. However, some participants would make their own assessment by looking at the visual boards and listening to the announcements and then speak to staff if required, while others would always confirm with station staff that the journey was possible.

"Radio Scotland is quite a good source, they usually give you updates" (Glasgow off-peak passengers)

5.2.6 Some respondents said that they would like to be informed of planned disruption through text (SMS) messages (if a mobile number was provided at time of purchase) and other media such as teletext.

"If a flight is cancelled, you can look up teletext. If there is major work on the trains, you should be able to look that up too" (Glasgow off-peak passengers)

Unplanned disruptions

5.2.7 At times where there is unplanned disruption (such as an incident on the line or bad weather) participants stated that it is crucial that such incidents are conveyed to them at the earliest opportunity.

"As soon as they find out, you would want to know" (Glasgow off-peak passengers)

"I'd want to know before I park my car" (Glasgow off-peak passengers)

5.2.8 Participants said that they were currently informed of unplanned disruptions through the media or the internet. Some actively check these channels for information, while others passively receive the information. Those participants who had access to the internet said that they might check the internet before their journey if they have heard about unplanned

problems, but would rely on accurate information from staff at the station. Most participants felt that once they start their journey and something goes wrong they can't do much about it and would not make a significant effort to obtain detailed information.

"I always listen out for delays on the radio on the day of my journey" (London leisure passenger)

"I would double check at the station with staff, because things can change" (Leeds business passenger)

"If it is a short journey I would trust the internet, however if it is a long journey, say Glasgow to Leeds, I would check with staff" (London leisure passenger)

"If you are on the train and something goes wrong, you can't do much about it…you just got to listen to the announcements" (London leisure passenger)

5.2.9 There is increased reliance on staff for information at times of unplanned disruption. Passengers often expect that staff will be able to provide up to date information and informed advice, especially on alternative journeys.

"I like to speak to someone [when there are unplanned disruptions], especially during the journey" (Cardiff leisure passenger)

"If you speak to someone they can give you recommendations on alternative routes…and I always tune out to announcements, I don't want to know unless I am affected" (Cardiff leisure passenger)

5.2.10 Some participants referred to frustration and concerns experienced when it transpires that staff do not have the most up to date information.

5.2.11 Visual information displays, either electronic or on notice boards at the station entrance, were referred to as a good method of informing passengers of on–going unplanned delays. Some participants also thought that instant updates on the news/radio/websites could be helpful, as they enable passengers to check before leaving home for their intended station. One participant commented that upon buying a ferry ticket, passengers will receive an automatic text (SMS) message if the ferry is cancelled. This was considered by the whole group as a good service.

6 National Rail Enquiries

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 The focus groups also explored participants' awareness of National Rail Enquiries, their views on the services it provides, and perceptions of National Rail Enquiries as a brand.

6.2 Awareness

6.2.1 Almost all participants were aware of National Rail Enquiries through its website and telephone service. Most think of National Rail Enquiries as a leading source of national rail journey and price information. However, only a few were aware of the TrainTracker services.

"They are the people that I phone" (London commuter)

"They have all the train information at hand and you just give them details of where you want to go" (London commuter)

"There is the website stuff available for passengers to use" (Leeds leisure passenger)

"You can get all the information about your journey from National Rail Enquiries" (Leeds business passenger)

"That's information in itself, information you need to be able to access the information in the first place. They can't expect people to use them if people don't know about them" (Leeds business passenger)

"I use the train a lot and I have never heard of the TrainTracker service" (Leeds leisure passenger)

6.2.2 A number of participants were unfamiliar with the 'National Rail Enquiries' brand name, or that they were users of National Rail Enquiries services – the website and 0845 service were referred to as "the rail number" or "that old BR number" or "the website with rail information". The low level of National Rail Enquiries brand awareness was illustrated by a Leeds leisure passenger who asked.

"Are they [National Rail Enquiries] the same as National Express?"

6.2.3 Some participants thought of the information services being offered by train operating companies and National Rail Enquiries as essentially similar, though most recognised that only National Rail Enquiries is national in scope, and that tickets cannot be purchased via National Rail Enquiries.

6.2.4 Of the participants who were accurately aware of the National Rail Enquiries service and chose not to use it, the reasons cited were mainly that other (TOC) services offer ticket purchasing, and/or that train operating companies are thought likely to have more up to date information on (their particular) services, or that face-to-face enquiries were preferred.

"I have heard of National Rail Enquiries but I've not used the telephone nor web services. If there is something I need to know I'll go straight down to the station and ask them" (Leeds leisure passenger)

6.3 Perception of National Rail Enquiries

6.3.1 There were a number of examples where participants had reportedly experienced problems with National Rail Enquiries services and were provided with incorrect information. These experiences, for these individuals, had in turn generated distrust of National Rail Enquiries services. On a whole, however, most participants thought that National Rail Enquiries website and telephone services provide accurate and reliable sources of information.

"Yes, I trust the information which I get from National Rail Enquiries" (Leeds business passenger)

"It's not let me down yet…why would you not trust them?" (Leeds business passenger)

6.4 Services (website, telephone service and TrainTracker)

Website and Telephone service

6.4.1 A slightly higher proportion of participants used the National Rail Enquiries website than the telephone service. However, those who did use the website on occasion would often also seek confirmatory information from the telephone service.

6.4.2 Participants were generally positive with respect to National Rail Enquiries website. For example, some participants liked the 'flexibility' that the website offered by being able to select either an arrival or departure time at specified stations, while other respondents liked the fact that engineering works were displayed when booking journeys.

"I think the website is fine…I quite like the fact that you can choose between departing or arrive by at stations" (London leisure passenger)

"I can't fault it" (Leeds leisure passenger)

"It's very simple, tells you all the information it requires from you and the different times" (Leeds leisure passenger)

6.4.3 A number of participants considered that there were no strong distinguishing features differentiating National Rail Enquiries website from other websites, and some such participants tended to choose to use their local train operator's website because they expected it to provide more accurate real–time information on the local services. In fact, many participants were unaware that the National Rail Enquiries website had real–time departure information, and one was choosing an alternative website specifically for real–time information.

"I prefer using the local information [referring to Arriva Trains Wales website]" (Cardiff commuter)

6.4.4 Some participants choose to use their local operators' website as it provided information promotions and offers. Others choose to compare the information from the National Rail Enquiries websites with others in order to check whether the information they were receiving was accurate. For example, one participant noted that he used the National Rail Enquiries website alongside others, such as Trainline. He remarked that:

"I usually use National Rail Enquiries website and Trainline and compare them as they tend to give out different information" (London leisure passenger)

"There are slight differences in how the information is displayed…the prices are sometimes different or sometimes one will have a different price" (Leeds leisure passenger)

The same participant stated that he did not therefore necessarily trust the prices quoted by National Rail Enquiries. This was, however, an isolated case and the majority of other participants considered the National Rail Enquiries website price information to be reliable.

6.4.5 The same largely positive views were expressed by most of the participants who had used the National Rail Enquiries telephone service.

6.4.6 Some who used National Rail Enquiries web and call centre services on different occasions (eg. when without access to a computer or web link) had similarly positive views on each, though the call centre service was seen as more at risk of errors in communication.

TrainTracker

6.4.7 Only a few participants were aware of the 'TrainTracker' voice recognition telephone service and TrainTracker text (SMS) service, with even fewer using either of the services. Those who were aware of the voice recognition service had become aware of it, and sometimes opted to use it, through the prompt at the start of a call to the 08457 48 49 50 telephone service.

"I have heard of it [TrainTracker] because it gives you an option when you call the 0845 number" (London leisure passenger)

6.4.8 There was widespread lack of awareness of the availability of these services and what they offer. However, as the following sections identify, there were mixed views on the likely take-up of such services by the travelling public, if awareness was increased.

TrainTracker – automated telephone service

6.4.9 There was a mixed response to the concept of the automated telephone service, when this was described to group participants. Many had experienced problems with other automated services, and were sceptical that this version would be helpful. Most participants did not think that they would use the automated TrainTracker because they thought it would be frustrating, and anticipated having to constantly repeat instructions.

"The automated voice would put me off" (London leisure passenger)

"TrainTracker [telephone] would not be as flexible as the website as you could get caught in a loop where it did not understand you and would be very costly" (London leisure passenger)

"I am fed up of hearing a computer; I want to talk to people" (Cardiff leisure passenger)

"I really dislike those automated phone lines…you just seem to get more mistakes" (Leeds leisure passenger)

6.4.10 The one participant who was using the service found it to be extremely useful and perceived it to be more reliable than talking to telephone or station staff, as she felt that it eliminated human error.

"The service [automated telephone service] is brilliant" (Cardiff leisure passenger)

"TrainTracker will tell you if there is a ten minute delay on one of your connections, it's brilliant" (Cardiff leisure passenger)

TrainTracker – text (SMS) service

6.4.11 One participant was using the TrainTracker text (SMS) service, although she was not aware that it was a National Rail Enquiries service, found it to be very accurate and provided flexibility in travel planning.

6.4.12 A number of participants found the concept hard to understand or confusing. However, many said that they would use the TrainTracker text (SMS) service if they understood how to use it correctly. Others thought the service could be useful as a "back up", especially where stations do not have staff. Most respondents were confused by this service.

"Do you text them a question?" (Glasgow commuter)

"How do you know what to text them?" (Glasgow commuter)

"I'd use the text service if I knew more about it. It's cheaper and its quicker as opposed to sitting on the phone" (Leeds leisure passenger)

"If they advertised them on the train that would be a great way to get people to know about them and subsequently use them" (Leeds business passenger)

Cost concerns

6.4.13 Participants were concerned about the cost of the TrainTracker services. Many expressed dissatisfaction that they had to pay for information.

"I would not dial those numbers, because they will cost…why can't both numbers be 0845" (London leisure passenger)

"I don't use text messaging for information as it would probably cost about £1.50" (Cardiff commuter)

"I don't think you should have to pay for getting information" (Cardiff commuter)

"I am not going to use that 0870 number that is expensive isn't it?" (Cardiff commuter)

"You want a guarantee that the information is accurate if spending a pound or more" (Cardiff commuter)

6.4.14 One participant said that if there was a free trial for the first three or four months it would be useful as it would build confidence in the service.

"If I am sitting at the station and the screen is not working I don't see why I should have to pay to find out where my train is, that would really annoy me to be honest" (Cardiff commuter)

7 Rail industry draft Vision for the provision of passenger information

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 Participants in all groups were asked to comment on a the rail industry's draft Vision for the provision of passenger information, developed by the industry's Passenger Information Strategy Group, membership of which is drawn from all train operating companies, Network Rail and Passenger Focus, and which is co-ordinated by National Rail Enquiries. The draft Vision is:

"To provide timely, relevant, accurate and consistent information – easily accessible through all media wherever and whenever required – so that passengers are able to make informed choices about their travel plans"

7.1.2 Reactions to the draft Vision were positive, and similar across the different passenger groups (i.e. commuters, business passengers and leisure travellers). There were no discernable differences in the responses of commuters, business and leisure travellers. Passengers' views, in detail, were as follows.

7.2 Views on the draft Vision

7.2.1 The draft Vision was easily understood and was initially well received by the majority of participants with most providing very positive comments and agreeing with the concept and key words.

"Oh, bless them" (London leisure passenger)

"It's what's needed isn't it?" (Leeds leisure passenger)

"It has all the right buzz words in it" (Leeds business passenger)

"You can't argue with it as it's what we all want" (Leeds business passenger)

"Sounds like utopia for travellers" (Cardiff leisure passenger)

"Short and sweet and straight to the point" (Glasgow commuter)

"If that is what the industry is working towards it is good" (London commuter)

"It's just common sense really" (Leeds leisure passenger)

"It's all encompassing" (Leeds leisure passenger)

"In theory I don't think you can ask for anything better" (Leeds leisure passenger)

7.2.2 However, on further consideration and reflection there was scepticism about the rail industry's ability to achieve the Vision. This scepticism tended to be due to a lack of confidence in the rail industry's ability to deliver in general, conditioned by poor previous experiences. The rail industry will need to work hard to dispel this underlying scepticism as it works towards the Vision.

7.2.3 A second qualification on the initially positive response to the draft Vision was expressed by some participants who thought that, rather than being an aspiration for the rail industry, these things should be viewed as *"a service that we should be receiving anyway".*

"As a Vision I think it's great, but it's asking an awful lot of a travel company" (Cardiff leisure passenger)

"It's good on paper, but in reality it is not really happening" (London commuter)

"Sounds wonderful, but how realistic is it" (Cardiff commuter)

"It reminds me of the old BR model 'we are getting there, well where are they now...they have to overcome past reputations" (Cardiff commuter)

"I don't know if it will come off as well as it sounds though" (Cardiff leisure passenger)

"They've encompassed everything they want to do, as long as they do it" (Leeds leisure passenger)

"It sounds good on paper as long as it happens in reality" (Leeds leisure passenger)

"I will believe it when I see it" (London leisure passenger)

"This is good, but ultimately it's about how they achieve it" (Leeds business passenger)

"They have not sorted the [complicated] fares for years, so why should this be any different" (London leisure passenger)

7.2.4 Only one group took this qualification further, arguing that the draft Vision was merely political propaganda.

"It looks like what politicians do, they're just telling people what they think we want to hear, but it doesn't really mean much" (Glasgow off-peak infrequent passengers)

"It's completely vague. It couldn't be more vague if it tried" (Glasgow off-peak infrequent passengers)

"Definitely written by a politician" (Glasgow off-peak infrequent passengers)

7.2.5 While no participants found the draft Vision hard to understand, one word that created some uncertainty was 'media'. Some participants were unclear about the scope of this term, and were unsure whether it extended to news, radio, newspapers, text (SMS) to mobile phones etc.

7.2.6 A number of participants were concerned that the draft Vision, by using the word "media", seemed to emphasise 'hi tech' information systems as opposed to 'traditional' face-to-face methods and in particular, the information-providing role of rail staff. For example, one group wanted clarification about whether 'all media' included direct, unmediated communication between people, rather than communication dependant on technology, especially the internet.

7.3 Cost of implementing the Vision

7.3.1 Partly following from the perceived 'technology emphasis', a large number of participants expressed concern that the draft Vision 'will come at a cost' to be borne by the passenger. The concern about costs being passed on to passengers were twofold: that costs would be added to ticket prices, and that passengers would have to pay for using the 'new media' (e.g. for text (SMS) messages).

7.3.2 The perceived additional costs were considered frustrating, and even unacceptable, as many felt that they were not currently receiving value for money from their rail services anyway, despite high fares.

"All of this is going to come at a price…the passenger always pays" (London commuter)

"We should be concerned what the draft Vision is going to cost on the price of your ticket"

"Will it happen though…and at what cost?" (Leeds business passenger)

7.4 Amendments to the draft Vision

7.4.1 Overall a clear majority felt that the draft Vision captured the key concepts and words. However, a number of suggestions were put forward by the various groups where it was thought it could be improved.

7.4.2 Some participants thought that the term **'timely'** should be replaced with **'real-time'**, while the term **'understandable'** could be incorporated. In addition, some felt that **'provide'** should be changed to **'ensure'**. One group suggested that **'customer service'** should somehow be captured in the Vision.

7.4.3 One group thought it could be shorter as they felt the last part did not really tell them anything. Two shorter versions were suggested:

"To provide timely, relevant and consistent information – easily accessible through all media wherever and whenever required"

"To provide timely, relevant and consistent information"

7.4.4 Other suggestions were more general, with some stating that the draft Vision statement should be backed up with more specific set targets and a promise of delivery.

"It would be good if they put something underneath the Vision statement to say this is what we want to do and this is how we intend to do it, by doing A, B, C, D, I think they are more believable" (Leeds business passenger)

"…easily understandable and accessible…"(Cardiff commuter)

"I agree with the first bit, as I have not ever been misled by National Rail Enquiries, but it's the 'easily accessible through all media', that's where I would be a bit sceptical" (London leisure passenger)

7.4.5 The following amended Vision consolidates most of the suggested textual changes and is offered to the Passenger Information Strategy Group for consideration:

*"To **ensure we** provide timely, relevant, accurate and consistent information – easily **understandable**, accessible **and affordable** wherever, whenever and **however** required – so that **all** passengers are able to make informed choices about their travel plans"*

7.5 Delivering the Vision

7.5.1 We asked participants in all of the groups how they thought the industry was currently performing against the draft Vision. There were mixed responses, but on a whole the industry were considered to performing poorly. Responses showed that these feelings were related to the inconsistent delivery of information and access to information.

"It's not easily accessible at the moment, pressing all those buttons is not easy and is very annoying" (Leeds business passenger)

"I have encountered positive experiences of the delivery of information, I have seen it work well – but it very much depends on the calibre of the staff" (Leeds business passenger)

"It would be nice to get the information on the move, rather than relying on planning on the computer" (London leisure passenger)

7.5.2 However, many of the negative responses were centred on the poor performance of the rail network as a whole, which some perceived was acting as an inhibiting factor to delivering the Vision.

"I don't know if any of the travel providers are achieving it…I think they are miles off" (Cardiff leisure passenger)

"The fabric of the railways is going to pieces and the technology around it is going up to space, instead of marrying the two together they are getting further and further apart" (Cardiff leisure passenger)

7.6 Current performance and priorities for improvement

7.6.1 We provided participants with a number of 'key elements of good practice' (as shown in table 7.1) of information provision which were identified from the ATOC/National Rail Enquiries Good Practice Guides for improving information to passengers.

Table 7.1 Key elements of good practice

Elements of good practice
consistency and accuracy of information from telephone contact centres
publicising National Rail Enquiries services on all promotional material
consistency of approach to production of pocket timetables
better information for passengers transferring between bus and train in the event of service disruption
consistency and accuracy of information on websites and other e-services
raising awareness of helpoints
improving access for railway staff to real time running and other up to date information
consistency of approach to what is displayed on screens at stations
improved information for passengers using smaller stations when engineering work is disrupting services
improvements to how passengers are told that engineering work will disrupt future journeys
consistency and clarity about how types of incident are described
consistency of approach to what is announced on trains
consistency of approach to what is announced at stations

7.6.2 In response to the thirteen elements, the groups generally approved of what they saw as a close match between these industry-generated improvement areas, and those that they had identified as 'essential' information requirements. For some participants, this provided some reassurance that the industry is 'aware of the issues'.

"They understand what's not working" (Glasgow off-peak passenger)

"It's good to see they know what is wrong" (London leisure passenger)

7.6.3 We asked the groups to rate how they felt the industry was currently performing for each of the key elements of good practice and what they considered as the priorities for improvement. Participants were asked to classify whether the industry were performing 'well', 'ok' or 'poorly' for a particular element of good practice and whether they thought that particular element was a 'high', 'medium' or 'low' priority area for improvement. We also asked participants to classify whether the industry were performing 'well', 'ok' or 'poorly' for the information requirements that they had themselves previously identified as 'essential' (i.e. those attributes identified in Table 3.2). They were also asked to rank their priority for improvement. The outcomes were as follows.

Current performance

7.6.4 The only element of good practice where all different passenger groups (i.e. business, leisure and commuters)[3] agreed that the industry was performing well was in the area of "consistency and accuracy of information on websites and other e-services". While, the only area where all groups considered the industry was performing poorly was "improved information for passengers using smaller stations when engineering work is disrupting services". For the remainder of the elements of good practice there was a mixture of views amongst the groups ranging from performing well to performing poorly.

7.6.5 Other elements of good practice that leisure passengers identified as performing well included:

- consistency of approach to production of pocket timetables; and
- consistency of approach to what is announced at stations.

7.6.6 The areas where leisure passengers perceived that the industry was performing poorly included:

- improved information for passengers using smaller stations when engineering work is disrupting services;
- consistency and clarity about how types of incident are described; and
- consistency of approach to what is announced on trains

7.6.7 The elements in which business passengers identified the industry as currently performing well included:

- consistency of approach to production of pocket timetables;
- consistency of approach to what is displayed on screens at stations; and
- consistency of approach to what is announced at stations.

7.6.8 In contrast, the areas where business passengers perceived that the industry was performing poorly included:

- consistency and accuracy of information from telephone contact centres;
- better information for passengers transferring between bus and train in the event of service disruption;
- raising awareness of helpoints;
- improving how passengers are told that engineering work will disrupt future journeys; and
- consistency and clarity about how types of incident are described

7.6.9 Finally, the additional element of good practice that most commuters identified as performing well was providing "better information for passengers transferring between bus and train in the event of service disruption". The commuters groups agreed only one additional element of good practice where they thought the industry was performing poorly – this was "consistency of approach to production of pocket timetables"

[3] Please note that there were three commuter groups, three leisure groups and one business group. For this analysis the Glasgow off-peak group is classified as 'leisure' as seven of the nine respondents were frequent leisure passengers.

Priorities for improvement

7.6.10 There were three elements of good practice that all three passenger groups agreed that should be considered a high priority for improvement. These included:

- improving access for railway staff to real time running and other up to date information;
- improving information for passengers using smaller stations when engineering work is disrupting services; and
- improving how passengers are told that engineering work will disrupt future journeys.

7.6.11 In addition to these high priority areas, leisure passengers collectively agreed that "consistency and accuracy of information from telephone contact centres" should be considered a high priority for improvement.

7.6.12 Although there were only three elements of best practice identified by all three passenger groups, other aspects of information provision were considered important by individual groups. For example, two of the three commuting groups identified "better information for passengers transferring between bus and train in the event of service disruption" and "consistency and accuracy of information on websites and other e-services" as a high priority for improvement, despite the fact that they were seen to be performing well.

7.6.13 There was also a direct correlation with some elements of good practice that were identified as 'performing poorly' and then identified as a high priority for improvement amongst the different passenger groups. For example, all three passenger groups identified "improved information for passengers using smaller stations when engineering work is disrupting services" as an area of poor performance and a high priority area for improvement.

7.6.14 In addition, business passengers rated the following elements as poor performing and a high priority for improvement:

- consistency and accuracy of information from telephone contact centres;
- better information for passengers transferring between bus and train in the event of service disruption; and
- improving how passengers are told that engineering work will disrupt future journeys

7.6.15 Finally, commuters also rated "improving access for railway staff to real time running and other up to date information" as poor performing and a high priority for improvement.

8 Information for all

8.1 Introduction

8.1.1 Depth interviews were undertaken in order to capture the needs and concerns of mobility, vision or hearing impaired passengers. In addition, an interview was undertaken with a member of the Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) which advises Government about transport for disabled people.

8.2 Information requirements

8.2.1 The main information requirements of mobility, vision and hearing impaired passengers are very similar to those of other passengers. Most of the 'essential' information requirements identified in Table 3.2 were also highlighted as important in order to plan and undertake a journey. However, there are also specific information needs (such as information on step free access at stations, access to the street environment, quality of visual and audio information, accessible toilets etc.) that most other travelling passengers would not need to consider when planning or taking a journey.

Planning the journey

8.2.2 There was mixed awareness of what information was available for identifying specific travel requirements when planning the journey. Having limited knowledge can create frustration and may lead to a lack of confidence. For example, two of the respondents were not aware that it was possible to pre-book assistance through train operating companies.

"I need to know about the station I am going to go to…are there stairs, lifts, is there access to the street, will I be able to change from platform to platform?" (mobility impaired passenger)

"If you are going on holiday and go to an unfamiliar station you want to know whether that station is accessible to wheelchairs and if it has any lifts or if it is manned" (mobility impaired passenger)

"I have trouble finding out information like whether the station has steps and whether there will be anyone there to help, things like that" (mobility impaired passenger)

"I can't possibly do a journey by myself because I can't find out enough information to make me feel confident that when I get to the other end someone will be there to help" (mobility impaired passenger)

8.2.3 DPTAC was also aware of the frustrations expressed by disabled passengers about accessing specific information and booking assistance, especially with many different train operating companies. DPTAC believes that a central portal for accessing information and booking assistance would make matters easier for disabled passengers.

8.2.4 Many of the information requirements were unique to the particular disability and not issues for the able-bodied or other disabled passengers. For example, one respondent remarked that *"I need to find out if someone is already [booked] on the train and in the wheelchair position - that is the sort of information I need to know".*

8.2.5 Other specific information requirements for mobility impaired passengers included issues such as whether there is an accessible toilet on the train, and whether staff operating the buffet will make a specific trip to investigate whether wheelchair users require assistance/service.

8.2.6 When undertaking local journeys, most respondents did not use the booking service. They said they generally received good service through other channels. For example, it was possible to turn up at the station and be helped onto the train, and a staff member would phone ahead to the desired station and arrange assistance. When undertaking longer journeys, respondents would often want to use the pre booking service – but some of them said they had found it inconsistent and unreliable.

"The system [booking for assistance] is not very good at all" (mobility impaired passenger)

8.2.7 One respondent provided an example where he booked assistance, but did not receive any assistance at his departing or arrival station, as requested. Another respondent said that he would always take special efforts to reduce this risk, and allow for contingencies at the station when requiring assistance.

"The secret is that if you pre-book a journey, make sure you check when you arrive at the station to have someone notify that you will require assistance at other end…it's alright booking in advance, but it does not always work – secret is to double check on the day and ask at the ticket desk to be met on arrival, that takes a lot of stress out of the journey" (visually impaired passenger)

8.2.8 When planning journeys, mobility and visually impaired respondents preferred to speak to staff, while deaf passengers tended to rely on the internet. There was also strong reliance on family members and partners to assist. Although delivery of the resulting assistance received poor feedback, the dedicated helplines to make such bookings were welcomed. One respondent remarked that the specialist assistance helplines for disabled passengers provided by train companies were useful and that other phone services were unreliable.

"I speak to the GNER Newcastle office and they arrange the ticket and assistance as well" (mobility impaired passenger)

"If you go through the normal channels [referring to the main National Rail Enquiries 08457 48 49 50 number] nobody seems to know what is happening" (mobility impaired passenger)

At the station and on the train

8.2.9 Information needs at the station and on the train are addressed by visual screens, audio announcements and staff assistance.

8.2.10 Most respondents said that it was important that staff were available to provide information and reassurance, especially in providing assistance to the platform and onto the train. However, their experience was that the quality of information received from staff was variable, and that staff were often indifferent to their needs. Each respondent provided examples of how they felt they were treated poorly.

"It would be nice if someone comes along and says, don't worry we know that you are here and can help" (mobility impaired passenger)

"The easiest way to get information [at the station] is to go straight to the information desk and talk to the people there…I usually get to the station half an hour before I am meant to leave and that gives enough time to get information and to arrange assistance" (visually impaired passenger)

"I think in most cases staff are unhelpful…I don't carry a stick and try to live life as normal as possible, so staff just think I am just trying it on. For example, the station manager at Victoria told me it was 'over there' - I know it is over there!" (visually impaired passenger)

8.2.11 A deaf passenger commented that he had experienced problems with staff not acknowledging his Hearing Dog and felt that this could be due to a lack of awareness among staff of the Hearing Dog scheme. The same passenger remarked that at the time of purchasing a ticket at the station he is often asked to step aside because there is a perception by the staff member that it will be time consuming. Finally, he felt that not all staff were aware of the disabled person's railcard and felt that *"some staff look at it suspiciously, you can see it in their facial expressions".* It was felt that many of the staff issues could be addressed with improved disability awareness training.

"They [the staff] want to deal with the queue behind me before I can buy a ticket…I find this really quite stressful, I have my bit of paper, it's not going to take any longer, I think it is a bad attitude when they do that" (deaf passenger)

8.2.12 The visually impaired passengers stated that they rely heavily on audio announcements at the station and on the train. It was felt that the quality and clarity of the announcements had improved, but concern was expressed about the number of last minute platform changes which can lead to trains being missed.

"Five minutes before the train arrives they will tell you to go to a different platform and by the time I get there the train is gone…they should know ten minutes before if a train is going to be from a different platform" (visually impaired passenger)

"Audio announcements have improved with technology...frustrating that announcements don't give you time to get to the train" (visually impaired passenger)

8.2.13 The concerns about last minute platform changes, and anxieties these cause, were also shared by deaf passengers. They felt it would be extremely useful if the information relayed on tannoy announcements was displayed simultaneously on visual information boards. In addition, it was felt that staff during this time can be stressed and less helpful.

"They never indicate last minute changes on the visual boards…the tannoy should match the visual indicator, but it never does that" (deaf passenger)

"I see people leaving the platform and I know something is wrong, but I don't know why, there is nothing visual telling me where to go…if there is no information it can be very stressful" (deaf passenger)

8.2.14 Visually impaired passengers described the text on visual screens at stations as too small and scrolling screens as moving too fast. In addition, some respondents felt that some visual boards were positioned poorly with respect to the sunlight and that the contrasting colours made screens difficult to view.

"Screens are not always of the right colour contrast or in the sunlight which can take away any information that might be there" (visually impaired passenger)

"The writing is too small and moves so fast by the time I read it the train is normally gone, that's why I get there half an hour before the train" (visually impaired passenger)

8.2.15 Deaf passengers also expressed some concerns about the quality of visual information at stations. It was felt that there is a need for more diagrams and more pictorial information. For example, the safety cards available on some train services were considered good practice and it was thought that the same approach could be taken forward for other information on the railway. This was considered extremely important for many deaf passengers who can't read very well.

8.2.16 It was also considered beneficial if signage was standardised (i.e. fonts, colours etc), rather than the status quo which differs between train operating companies. Other suggestions for improvement included maps displayed at stations, more continuous signage (i.e. smaller gaps between signs on station concourses) and more time to read flowing or scrolling signs.

"Pictorial information is so much clearer and easier to see" (deaf passenger)

"Having all the different signage from the different train companies can be difficult" (deaf passenger)

8.2.17 Automated announcements on trains were considered good and were preferred to driver announcements as they allowed sufficient time to prepare for exiting the train. No concerns were expressed about the clarity and audibility of the announcements. However, it was stated that these should be issued during quiet times (i.e. when the train is slowing down). One respondent said that he would like more information on what facilities are on-board the train – such as location of toilets (and whether they are working) and catering services.

"Automated announcements are better than driver announcements because drivers have so many other things to think about they can forget. Some drivers go over board and some drivers don't use the microphones" (visually impaired passenger)

"Automated announcements should be specific…they should be prior to arriving at the station during the quiet time that the train is slowing down as it approaches the station…and when it moves onto the next station the next stop should be announced" (visually impaired passenger)

"If you make announcements during the loud period when the train is at full speed the voice has to be enhanced a lot and it becomes intrusive…so all announcements should be when the train is decelerating or accelerating" (visually impaired passenger)

8.2.18 Visual information on trains was considered more reliable than other public transport information, such as those at bus stops. However, it was strongly felt that any announcements that a driver should make, should also be reflected on the visual screens.

8.2.19 Other aspects of information which were considered beneficial included an announcement indicating which side of the train to get out of.

"At the moment you will have to ask a customer…it would be good if automatic announcements could include it" (visually impaired passenger)

8.3 National Rail Enquiries

8.3.1 Most respondents had used National Rail Enquiries website or telephone service, but none were aware of the TrainTracker services. Most expressed frustration with the general customer service that they received from staff at National Rail Enquiries call centre.

"They tend to just want to get you off the phone as it is not a usual enquiry and they just try and pass you onto someone else" (mobility impaired passenger)

"As soon as you mention disabled they just want to off-load you onto the disability helplines….once you get through onto the disability line they are wonderful" (mobility impaired passenger)

"If you ring and ask for help because I need to do a journey by myself, generally no one has an answer [to the questions raised] and it is just frustrating" (mobility impaired passenger)

"It seems the times I have rung, either you get pushed about and never get answers to your questions or you get the feeling they are not very pleased having to do deal with you" (mobility impaired passenger)

"I have rung and asked for information about a station that I need to go to and have been told I am sorry I don't have that information and things like that which is annoying…I need to know lots of details and they just don't seem to know" (mobility impaired passenger)

"[When I call] you get the feeling…for god's sake not another one [making a query about disabled people]" (mobility impaired passenger)

"I am not a pushy person and I don't like to shout at people, so I just end up making alternative arrangements and using the car" (mobility impaired passenger)

8.3.2 Although the website was considered helpful for journey planning, one respondent commented that he found information that he received from National Rail Enquiries telephone service to be unreliable.

"I find that when I get to the station the information that I have received is different" (visually impaired passenger)

"You get the information on the phone and when you get to the station nine times out of ten you find that it is different" (visually impaired passenger)

8.4 Suggestions for improvement

8.4.1 One respondent commented that airports represent good practice in information provision – it was thought that this could be due to the fact that international airports must provide electronic and signage information clearly as most people who travel through international airports speak many different languages. It was suggested that the rail industry should learn lessons from airports in respect to information provision.

"I have never had any problems at the airports, if you look at the airports everything is visual…all the cancelations, the delays the changes they are all up on the screen…also if they change a time or something its flashed so it makes you aware" (deaf passenger)

"In an ideal world if train stations were like airports with regard to visual information that would be perfect" (deaf passenger)

"At airports I have always found that customer care is so much better compared to stations" (deaf passenger)

8.4.2 One respondent said that it would be useful if there was information on the train identifying whether the approaching station had step free access. She said that this could be included as part of an audio announcement or through the use of a visual symbol on the train or at the station on departing boards. She also thought there should be more signage in stations, for instance, identifying where disabled toilets are located.

"You sit on a train and worry all the time, you worry what's going to happen when you get there, will I get off ok…you need to know whether stations are disabled friendly" (mobility impaired passenger)

"It would be great to have a disability symbol [on the visual scrolling screens] after the name of the station which tells you if it is step free and it shows that you that you will be ok… If I saw the symbol [step free access] I would think, that's good for that I can cope" (mobility impaired passenger)

"I have never seen a sign telling you which exits are wheelchair friendly" (mobility impaired passenger)

"You usually need to be on top of a disabled toilet before you have found it" (mobility impaired passenger)

8.4.3 Other suggestions included a dedicated information point at all stations which could be accessed by disabled passengers and an information booklet that is available on the train which identifies the services available for disabled passengers i.e. locations of disabled toilets, how personal assistance by staff can be provided etc. Another respondent suggested that information should be provided to passengers so that they know what hours stations are staffed and that there should be wider use of induction loop systems for delivering information at stations and on trains.

8.4.4 There was a general consensus amongst all respondents that there should be improved disability awareness training for all staff. Moreover, future information developments should not rely on technology and lose sight of the importance of staff. This view was expressed as:

"National disability training for all staff…the industry seems to put it at the bottom of their requirements and general customer care would also improve" (visually impaired passenger)

8.4.5 This view was supported by DPTAC who encourage the rail industry to incorporate disability awareness training into their customer service training programmes.

8.5 The draft Vision for the provision of passenger information

8.5.1 The draft Vision was well received by these respondents, but like most other passengers they expressed some scepticism that it would be delivered.

"It would be great if it could happen, but I think we are in dreamland and it will never happen" (visually impaired passenger)

8.5.2 One respondent felt that the draft Vision could be amended so that it reflects all passengers. It was suggested the term 'all' be included to reflect that all passengers, including the disabled, are being considered.

"…you could include words such as 'journeys for all' or 'information for all' as the use of these terms shows that it's not too generalised" (mobility impaired passenger)

[The draft Vision needs to show] "That anybody with any type of impairment is welcome on the railways" (mobility impaired passenger)

8.5.3 As in the previous section of the report, one respondent expressed concern that the draft Vision was relying on the internet.

"It seems like you need to use the internet, I can't use it and have to rely on the missus" (visually impaired passenger)

8.5.4 DPTAC were encouraged by the draft Vision and supported it. However, they felt that as information improves it is essential that it is delivered by fully trained staff.

9 Conclusions and Recommendations

9.1 Information Requirements by Stage of Journey

Passengers identified a range of information requirements which were considered 'essential', on the basis that if the rail industry failed to deliver the required information satisfactorily it would be difficult or impossible to plan or undertake a journey.

Four distinct stages of journey where certain specific types of information are each essential are: journey planning, at the station, on-train, and post-journey. The research has identified a number of key 'information elements' associated with each, together with several broad criteria or 'reasonable expectations' of the quality of information service delivery.

Key Information Elements by journey stage

Planning stage

- times of trains, fares, possibility of experiencing delays or changes to their journey;
- additional less critical information at the journey planning stage includes likely level of crowding.

At the station

- platform information for arriving/departing trains, expected (as well as scheduled) time of arrival of trains, details of train formation (including number of carriages, particularly if reduced), the location of specific carriages and the facilities on-board the train;
- any delays/cancellations, with alternatives (routes, modes) in the event of significant delay.

On-train

- any delays, with implications for connections.

Post-Journey

- return journey times and local transport connections for the ongoing journey stage.

9.2 Key Criteria for Satisfactory Delivery

Passengers expect that all relevant information should be:

- easily accessible to all passengers - including being free or easily affordable, and easily and quickly obtained;
- clear and easy to understand;
- accurate and up to date;
- issued promptly (when requested) or in a timely manner (this applies in particular to warnings of disruption or other problems).

These 'reasonable expectations' of satisfactory information delivery apply to every stage in the journey, and they broadly coincide with the criteria identified in the rail industry's draft Vision (see later), though the current draft Vision does not refer to affordability.

9.3 Experience of using different (National Rail Enquiries and Other) Media

The majority of information at the planning stage is accessed through telephone services and websites. Passenger preferences between alternative media are mainly based on what they were most familiar with using, or found most convenient. Website users tended also to believe that this channel should be the more reliable, as it eliminates the risk of human communication errors that can arise in telephone call centre enquiries. Many telephone users did not have access to the internet at home or they preferred to have personal contact with an operator.

About half of the passengers participating in this research said they use National Rail Enquiries' telephone service or website. Of the remainder, at least two thirds were not sure which service they were using. The other one-third that were aware said they mostly use their local train operator's website or telephone service – the reason being that the majority believed that their local train operator's information would be more up to date and accurate than National Rail Enquiries, especially in respect of service disruptions.

9.4 Information at time of Disruptions

The information provided by the rail industry across all media (i.e. websites, from staff, telephone, visual signage and screens and audio announcements) is on the whole considered good, accurate and reliable. However, many passengers had occasional experiences of problems, especially during times of disruption, either planned or unplanned. They expect to be provided with:

- timely information that identifies the extent of the interruption; and
- clear, relevant and trustworthy information on alternative travel options, including advice on alternative routes and/or bus services availability.

The need for improvement in this area is also recognised by the rail industry where there is an acknowledgment that staff need to be provided with more timely and accurate information at times of disruption. It is especially important that staff get consistent information and inform passengers in the first hour of disruption.

9.5 Importance of both Traditional and Hi-Tech systems

Staff presence at stations and on trains is considered an extremely important medium for delivering information. Having the ability to communicate with staff face–to–face is often considered essential, especially at times of unplanned disruption, when staff can provide considerable reassurance in confusing and fast-changing situations. Staff are, of course, able to help in these circumstances only when they themselves have access to the relevant, up-to date information. A significant concern from passengers is that potentially helpful and responsive staff appear often to lack this. Future information system developments should therefore give due weight to the need for appropriately and promptly updating staff.

The discussion of passengers' information needs revealed a clear view that 'traditional' staff-centred information and more 'hi tech' channels are equally important, and complementary. Some participants expressed concern that the industry's increasing future technological reliance could lead to down-scaling in the numbers of customer-facing staff and/or their information-providing function. This clearly suggests the need for mix and balance in future

system development, with improvements in both traditional and more innovative information systems.

There is strong demand from passengers, and enthusiasm for, improvements and innovations in information delivery based on technological developments, especially through text (SMS) services. It may therefore seem surprising that despite this, there is a general lack of awareness of the current text (SMS) services offered by both train operators and National Rail Enquiries. When research participants were informed about National Rail Enquiries' current text (SMS)-based services, they showed approval and strong interest in using them, though there were mixed attitudes towards take-up, due to uncertainty about how well the system would perform, and concerns about cost. There is clear value in improving the marketing of the existing National Rail Enquiries services.

9.6 Meeting the needs of disabled passengers

There is a lack of awareness by mobility, hearing and visually impaired passengers of what information is available to help plan a journey. This lack of knowledge creates frustration and a lack of confidence. There is a desire for a central portal for accessing information and booking assistance for disabled passengers. Information provision at airports was considered best practice and lessons should be learnt by the rail industry.

It is a matter for concern that, albeit on a very small sample, negative experiences of staff were reported as commonplace by all of the mobility, hearing and visually impaired passengers that were interviewed; this was in contrast to the experiences of other passengers. A conclusion is that all customer-facing staff (including both station and call centre staff) should receive a higher–standard of 'disability awareness' training and periodic refresher courses. This view is also shared by DPTAC.

9.7 Awareness and Perceptions of National Rail Enquiries Brand

Although there is a high level of use of National Rail Enquiries through its website and telephone service, many users do not refer to "National Rail Enquiries" services by name, and the National Rail Enquiries brand lacks immediate recognition and identity. Passengers are often unsure what range of services, including National Rail Enquiries, train operating company and other services, is actually available to use, and they may be uncertain which service they have actually used on different occasions.

9.8 Passenger Response to the rail industry's draft Vision for the provision of passenger information

The draft Vision captured the key concepts and words, is easily understood and is well received; some minor changes were suggested. The key concern is that the draft Vision seemed to emphasise 'hi tech' information systems as opposed to 'traditional' face-to-face methods and in particular, the information-providing role of rail staff.

Although there is a level of scepticism that the draft Vision, while good, was in reality difficult to achieve, this scepticism tended to be due to a lack of confidence in the rail industry's ability to deliver in general, conditioned by poor previous experiences. The rail industry will need to work hard to dispel this underlying scepticism as it works towards the Vision.

9.9 Comparing the draft Vision with current experience

When passenger information was considered in the context of the draft Vision, on the whole the industry was considered to be performing poorly. This is perhaps not surprising, given that the draft Vision is seen as a 'statement of the ideal'. While passengers can on this basis reasonably demand comprehensive improvements, there are certain areas where the need for improvement was seen as particularly high in priority and urgency. The research suggests that no particular element of information requirements was considered unimportant or a low priority for improvement. Three information requirements that were deemed a high priority for improvement that were universal across all focus groups were:

- improving access for railway staff to real time running and other up to date information;
- improved information for passengers, especially at smaller stations, when engineering work is disrupting services; and
- improvements to how passengers are told that engineering work will disrupt future journeys.

9.10 Ideas for Future System Enhancements

Participants were invited to consider additions or enhancements to the range of 'information elements' currently supplied. While many passengers would be content with improvement in the 'basic' or 'essential' information elements, several ideas were put forward for delivering types of information that are not currently available, through any existing channel. One such idea was to publish information on the 'performance record' of timetabled trains, in terms of punctuality and cancellations, and possibly also crowding. This might enable passengers to make better-informed choices.

9.11 Recommendations and Next Steps

We recommend that National Rail Enquiries and Passenger Focus with rail industry partners consider how to:

- raise passenger awareness of available sources of information and improve understanding of what each offers;
- in particular communicate the benefits of TrainTracker text (SMS) and reassure customers of its cost – National Rail Enquiries could consider a one month free trial period;
- provide better information for mobility, hearing and visually impaired passengers; this might involve additional disability awareness training for staff;
- improve information provision to staff at times of service disruption, including on alternatives available to passengers (route and mode);
- exploit the future opportunities for innovation while satisfying the continuing demand for more traditional staff-centred customer information services.
- encourage train operating companies to undertake additional complementary marketing and branding of National Rail Enquiries and its services (this could include

marketing through station information points, help points, screens, announcements etc);

- ensure that the ATOC/NRES Good Practice Guides adequately cover the question of information to passengers during the first hour of an unplanned disruption, including 'holding' messages and the transfer of information from one TOC/station to another.

9.12 Further research

Additionally, Passenger Focus and National Rail Enquiries might consider:

- **quantitative research** to establish national passenger priorities for improvements across the different information elements, channels and delivery mechanisms. This would aid a more detailed review of the industry's plans and priorities, and it would establish a baseline for tracking improvements;
- **ongoing monitoring** (alongside, and complementing, the National Passenger Survey) of customer experience vs. expectations of rail information delivery, to track the impacts and benefits of improvements made, and to help guide the direction of continuing improvement efforts and investments.

Appendix A – Topic Guide & Show Material

Information Note

Project Title:	Passenger Focus Information Provision
MVA Project Number:	C3699300
Subject:	Focus Group Topic Guide – FINAL
Note Number:	Version: 1
Author(s):	Adrian Housley
Reviewer(s):	Martin Dix
Date:	5 February 2008

1 Introduction (3 mins)

- Introduce self, MVA and Passenger Focus
  - **MVA Consultancy**: are an independent market research company with extensive expertise within the transport industry.
  - **Passenger Focus** is the independent national rail consumer watchdog.
- Explain "rules" and introduction to group (phones off, no right or wrong answers, anonymity, recorder, PF observers present etc).
- Explain purpose of focus groups
  - "The main aim of this focus group is to understand your information requirements and any problems that you experience in getting the information that you need to plan your rail journeys or during your journeys themselves. In relation to this we would like to get your views on what you think the rail industry should be doing to make planning your journeys easier and to give you better information during your journey".

2 Introducing the group (5 mins)

Ask group members to introduce themselves giving:

- their name;
- how often they have travelled by rail in the last year; and
- for what purpose they **mainly** travel by rail (i.e. commute, leisure, business).

3 How do they currently access information? (10 mins)

- How do you currently get information for your journeys? (Prompt: in advance of your journey, at the station, on the train, on travelling to/from the station)

  Probe sources of information (i.e. websites, text messages, printed timetables etc).

- Why do you choose to get it this way? (probe advantages/disadvantages)
- On the whole do you find the information that you receive reliable/accurate/helpful? (why/why not) Probe for examples of inaccurate information.
- What stages during your journey do you most look for information? Probe: why?
- What information, when and how will best help you to make informed decisions about what to do at times of disruption?
- Are there any other problems that you experience with accessing information/ the quality of this information?

  (Prompt: information about planned/unplanned delays, schedule changes, cancellations, etc)

4 Information requirements (15 mins)

- Thinking about your travel as a [INSERT BUSINESS, LEISURE or COMMUTER DEPENDING ON GROUP TYPE] rail user what information do you need/want:
  - In advance of your journey
  - At the station
  - On the train
  - About travelling to/from the station

  (Prompt: information about planned/unplanned delays, schedule changes, cancellations, etc)

  [Write up on flip charts]

- Looking at these which of these are essential (highlight on flipcharts)? Which are just nice to have? (probe why?)
- Looking at these flipcharts at which stages of your journey is information most/least important. (probe why?).
- Would these information requirements that you have listed be any different if you were making a different type of journey (i.e. business/leisure/commuting)? (Probe why?)

5 Preferred Information sources/services/products (5 mins)

- Thinking about the information requirements you previously discussed how would you ideally like to receive this information
  - In advance of your journey (prompt: websites, text alerts, contact centres)
  - At the station (prompt: helpoints, announcements, station information screens, posters, ticket office, pocket timetables)
  - On the train (prompt: announcements, screens)
  - About travelling to/from the station (prompt: websites, text alerts, contact centres)

(Prompt: information about planned/unplanned delays, schedule changes, cancellations, etc)

- What information provision products/services would you like you see in the future?

6 National Rail Enquires (10 mins)

- Have you heard of National Rail Enquiries?
- Who runs NRE?
- What services do they provide?
- What do you think of NRE? (probe: do you trust it, what do you like/dislike) why?

Inform participants that National Rail Enquiries provides the following products/channels/services **[showcard A]:**

  - 08457 48 49 50 timetable, fares, real time running and other information by telephone;
  - nationalrail.co.uk online timetable, fares, real time running and other information;
  - 0871 200 49 50 traintracker - real time running and timetable enquiry information via automated voice recognition system;
  - Traintracker - text 8 49 50 real time running information.

- Have you used any these and how often?
- What are your experiences of these products? (probe: useful, helpful, accurate, reliable, up to date etc)
- If you don't use these – why?
- What else could NRE provide that you would find helpful?

[at the conclusion of this section explain that NRE is jointly funding the research with PF and that this was not mentioned earlier as we wanted to understand what level of knowledge and understanding participants have of NRE and their services]

7 Industry Vision (10 mins)

[Explain] The government wants to focus the drive on improving passenger information on the railways around the National Rail Enquiries Service.

National Rail Enquiries, on behalf of the rail industry and in consultation with Passenger Focus, has developed a draft vision for passenger information. This Vision covers all aspects of information, not just things related to National Rail Enquiries products. It is:

"To provide timely, relevant, accurate and consistent information – easily accessible through all media wherever and whenever required – so that passengers are able to make informed choices about their travel plans." **[showcard B]**

- How appropriate and meaningful do you think the Vision is? – why?
- Do you think anything is missing?
- Do you understand everything in the Vision? - why?
- Is there anything contained that you think is unnecessary? – why?
- Do you have any suggestions for an alternative Vision?
- focusing on the key words highlighted on your showcard, are there areas more important than others? which areas (timely, relevant, accurate, consistent and accessible) do you think should take priority? Why?

8 Achieving the Vision (15 mins)

- From your experience as a [INSERT BUSINESS, LEISURE or COMMUTER DEPENDING ON GROUP TYPE] passenger, how do you think the rail industry is currently performing in achieving this Vision? Why? What areas are they failing?
- I would now like to look at your priorities as a passenger for improving on industry's current performance. Before we begin I would like us to look at our earlier list of 'essential' – are there any areas of information that we need to include? **[include new suggestions on flipchart]**.

  [Split the group into two groups. Ask them to write the essential items identified onto the provided blank showcards (or post–it notes). Handout the mini showcards and explain that these are examples that the industry consider important. One group will be looking at **performance** and one will be looking at **improvement**. Provide each group with a blank flipchart.

  – Ask group one to take all the showcards and pin (or blue tack) each card onto the flipchart into the areas where they think the industry is 'performing well', 'not so well' and 'poorly'
  – Ask group two to take all the showcards and pin (or blue tack) each card onto the flipchart into the areas where they think are the priority areas for improvement, classified as 'high', 'medium' and 'low'

  Ask each group to explain their reasons and ask the other group if they agree.

9 Views on Elements of the Vision (12 mins)

- I would now like to provide you with a few examples of the industry's current thinking about information provision, in several areas of passenger information. I would like to get your views whether you think they are on track? [emphasise that the examples are just a few of a whole set of good practice standards]

[divide the group into pairs or three and provide a showcard of one of the scenarios]

- For your example, I would like you to discuss whether you agree with the industry requirements, whether any on the list are unnecessary/unimportant and whether you think there is any important items that are missing. **[handout relevant showcards]**

[get each mini-group to report back to group]

10 Revisit the Vision (5 mins)

- Looking again at the Vision statement, is there anything more you would like to say or add?

11 Thank and Close

- Opportunity for final comments
- Thank and close

Showcard A
National Rail Enquiries Services

- 08457 48 49 50 timetable, fares, real time running and other information by telephone;

- nationalrail.co.uk online timetable, fares, real time running and other information;

- 0871 200 49 50 traintracker – real time running and timetable enquiry information via automated voice recognition system;

- Traintracker – text 8 49 50 real time running information.

Showcard B
Draft Vision

- *"To provide timely, relevant, accurate and consistent information – easily accessible through all media wherever and whenever required – so that passengers are able to make informed choices about their travel plans."*

MVA Consultancy provides advice on transport and other policy areas, to central, regional and local government, agencies, developers, operators and financiers.

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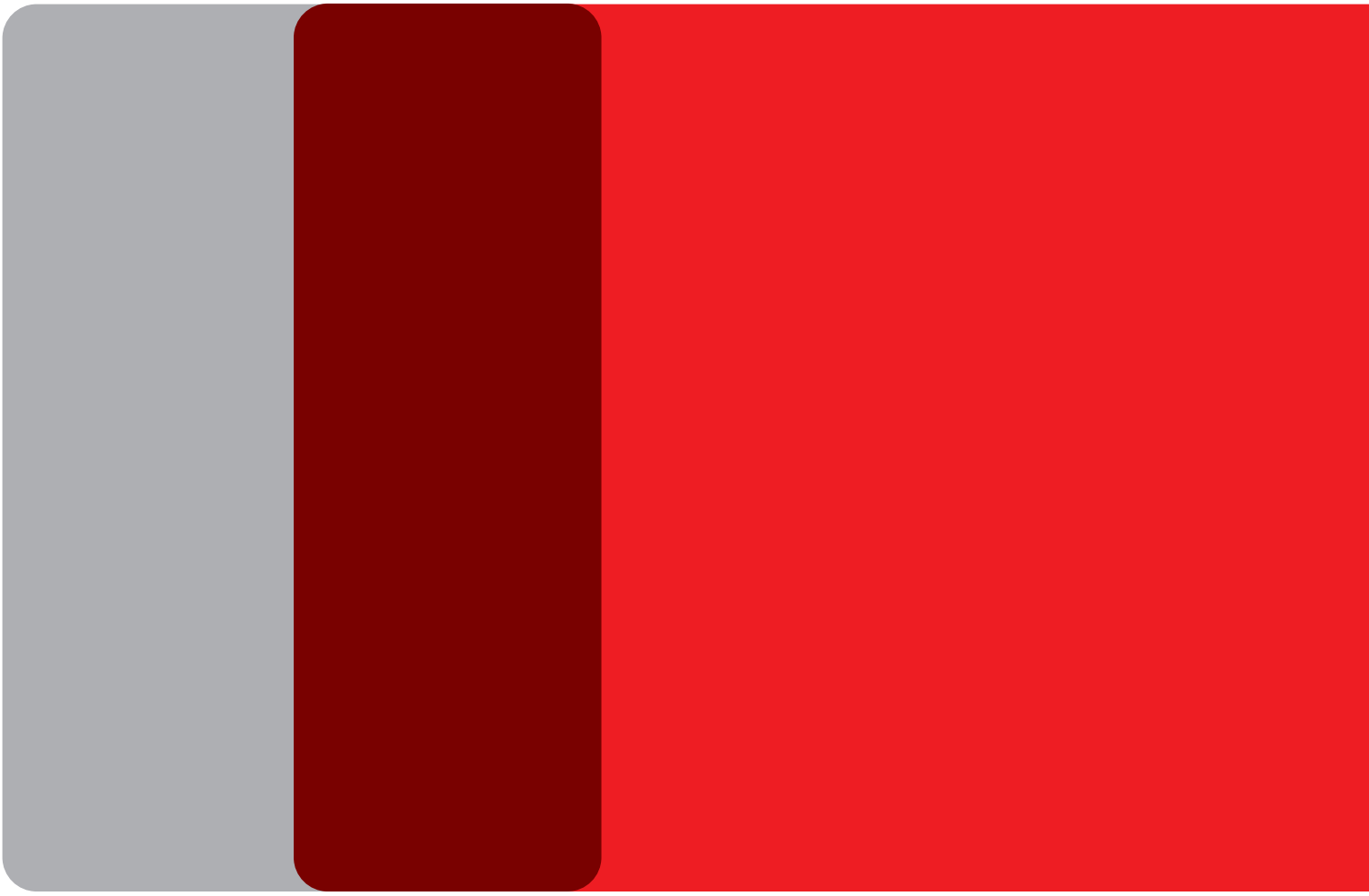

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