



Passenger needs during Thameslink Programme construction

Findings of qualitative research

Prepared for Passenger Focus, First Capital Connect and Southeastern

November 2008



Colin Foxall CBE

Introduction

This report is about the management of disruption to passenger journeys while the £5.5 billion Thameslink project is built. The scheme aims to deliver significant additional capacity on the First Capital Connect Bedford to Brighton route and, ultimately, other routes including First Capital Connect's East Coast Main Line (ECML) services.

The need for Thameslink to be upgraded is clear – and at last it is under way. However, for some passengers there will be pain along the way. Keeping the disruption to a minimum and communicating effectively with passengers during construction are critical to maintaining passenger satisfaction.

Passenger Focus, the independent national rail consumer watchdog, is pleased to have worked with First Capital Connect and Southeastern, the two train companies whose passengers will feel the impact of Thameslink construction first, to provide a proper understanding of passengers' needs and expectations. This report gives the views of those passengers taking part.

I hope the rail industry will use the research to ensure that passengers' concerns about the disruption are addressed, and that it will minimise the inconvenience to today's passengers while work is being done to deliver a better service in the future. The industry must be particularly mindful of the needs of those passengers permanently disadvantaged by the withdrawal of Thameslink trains to Barbican and Moorgate stations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colin Foxall'.

Colin Foxall CBE
Chairman
Passenger Focus



The key findings

This qualitative research involved 58 passengers contributing to discussion groups and 11 giving depth interviews. Overall, passengers believed that the benefits of Thameslink Programme will greatly outweigh the negatives, the latter including a persistent fear that fares will rise to pay for the investment. However, passengers currently using Barbican and Moorgate will be permanently inconvenienced. The rail industry must recognise the disbelief, and anger, that some will feel and do everything possible to help people adjust.

Other concerns highlighted, included:

- whether journey times would increase
- the knock-on impact on other modes of transport, e.g. exacerbating overcrowding on certain London Underground lines.
- localised inconvenience caused by upgrade work, particularly at individual stations
- whether station congestion will get worse as a result of increasing capacity on the trains themselves.

Striking in this research is the vital role that passenger communications has to play in delivery of the Thameslink Programme, essentially an infrastructure upgrade and fleet renewal. If people are told what is going on – and in sufficient time – they will plan around the disruption. Getting the communications right, so that passengers do not feel that they are being kept in the dark, as they tell us they have felt in the past, will be key to meeting passengers' expectations during Thameslink construction. Passengers feel that the railway has a duty to get this right – the industry must not let them down.

It is worth highlighting particular findings within the 'passenger communications' theme:

- i** That trying to 'spin' disruption news may be counterproductive (e.g. linking today's pain with capacity improvements in three years' time)
- ii** That passengers expect the communications to provide absolute clarity about:
 - timetable alterations that will occur, including when changes will happen
 - alternatives available in respect of each timetable alteration
 - ticket validity if using a different route/mode than usual (this applies to, but is not limited to, passengers using the Farringdon-Barbican-Moorgate route).
 - localised disruption (e.g. during platform extension work at stations)
- iii** That disabled passengers, while already used to pre-planning journeys, will be reliant on good quality information about the accessibility of alternatives routes/modes and of individual stations while they are subject to construction works (e.g. is Luton to Brighton using the Northern Line from Kentish Town to London Bridge suitable for a wheelchair user? And if not, what is the alternative)
- iv** That, while ensuring passengers are properly aware of how Thameslink construction will affect them, it should also be clear which journeys are not affected. It is in passengers' interests to understand which journeys are 'business as usual', as well as those that are

disrupted (e.g. clarity that overnight closures between London Bridge and St. Pancras International does not mean there are no trains from London to St. Albans).

The research also highlights that passengers have emotional, as well as rational, concerns about the disruption they may face. Train companies must not overlook the emotional concerns: for example, lengthening journey times by just a few minutes can have a disproportionate impact on some passengers' family or work life. These emotional factors can be best summarised as passengers needing the railway to:

- Focus yet further on the hygiene factors of punctuality, passenger information, cleaning etc.
- Act in ways that maintain passenger confidence in the industry
- Stick to the promises made about Thameslink Programme
- Give reassurances about safety of the infrastructure while it is being upgraded (passengers are conscious that building sites are dangerous)
- Provide additional human presence so that advice and assurance can be given about alternative arrangements
- Give complete clarity about the temporary timetables that will operate.

Finally, passengers expect – but worry that it won't happen – train companies to coordinate with each other and with London Underground (e.g. avoiding having a critical London Underground route closed at the same time as the central core).

The industry has responded positively to the findings in this research. The Thameslink Programme 'brand' is innovative, striking and makes no bones that this work cannot be achieved without disruption. Time will tell how good the industry is at empathising with passengers who are inconvenienced, however trivial that inconvenience might on the face of it appear. Effective passenger communication is vital, but so is sticking to promises made and delivering the railway's hygiene factors – like punctuality. For example, it won't matter how good the communication is if Network Rail does not reopen the route on time after weekend and overnight closures.

The full Outlook Research report is reproduced in this publication. Passenger Focus will now work closely with the rail industry to ensure that promises are kept and that the findings in this research stay at the forefront of thinking throughout delivery of the Thameslink Programme.

Guy Dangerfield
Passenger Link Manager
Passenger Focus



Karen Boswell

First Capital Connect overview

As the primary customer-facing beneficiary of the Thameslink Programme, train-operator First Capital Connect has a unique responsibility to lead the Programme's information and communications campaign, working in co-operation with its partners, Network Rail, Southern, Southeastern, and Transport for London.

First Capital Connect and Southeastern were delighted to work with Passenger Focus on this important piece of research. It confirms that customer reliance on good communications – to plan their journeys avoiding affected routes is their number one priority. Customers will generally accept that service disruption is an inevitable consequence of the Thameslink Programme. But the research shows that all the Train Operating Companies and the rail industry as a whole will be judged as much on the effectiveness of the communications campaign as on the impact of the infrastructure work and the resulting service improvements. Our communications campaign, with its eye-catching imagery (shown below) will address many of the issues in this research. A new website wholly dedicated to the Thameslink Programme gives many more details, and provides the opportunity to register for updates and free-alerts. www.thameslinkprogramme.co.uk

The key messages to customers are that the Thameslink Programme is now here, and there will be a lot of work happening which could affect train journeys on the Thameslink route for the next few years.

This £5.5 billion Programme, funded by the Government, lasts until the end of 2015 and will provide new longer and more frequent trains, new and improved stations, new track and new cross-London routes. The Thameslink Programme will more than double passenger capacity on one of Europe's busiest stretches of railway (the route through London Bridge, Blackfriars and Farringdon stations). Tens of thousands of customers will benefit daily. But the works are likely to cause some inconvenience, particularly late at night or at weekends. Customers may also have to allow more time, perhaps choosing to catch a bus, Tube or even walk a short distance, to complete their journey.

The good news:

- Thanks to longer and more frequent trains, there will be up to 16 trains per hour through central London by 2012 and up to 24 trains per hour by the end of 2015 – it means a train every 2-3 minutes at peak times.
- Passengers at Blackfriars, Farringdon and many other stations on the Thameslink route will see major improvements by 2012. London Bridge station will be transformed by the end of 2015.
- There'll be many more cross-London places customers can reach without having to change trains, by the end of 2015.
- Most if not all trains on the Thameslink route will be brand new and built to FCC's specifications, by the end of 2015. Some of these new trains are planned to start in service from late 2012. Before then, 92 new air-conditioned 377 Electrostar carriages will be progressively rolled out through 2009.

- Whilst it's not the main goal, many journeys will be quicker, with more trains per hour to more destinations with fewer changes.
- During summer 2010 Blackfriars station will be closed entirely for a 4-week period.

The not-so-good news:

- From September 2008, building work at Farringdon means new walking routes around and through the station; customers may need to allow more time.
- Blackfriars Tube station closes for essential redevelopment for two and a half years from March 2009.
- Thameslink trains will no longer run to Barbican or Moorgate after March 2009 (note: FCC's Great Northern trains will still serve Moorgate from Finsbury Park).
- During the construction, customers will always be able to get into London, but from December 2008 and through 2009, the Thameslink route between St Pancras International and London Bridge will be closed late weekday evenings and for most weekends.

This research highlighted a wide range of issues for the industry to consider. In particular, we recognise:

- That effective communication with customers is absolutely critical
- That there will be uncertainty over alternative routes that can be used during the disruption. Our communications plan and the Thameslink Programme website will address this.
- The impact on customers who use FCC's trains to Barbican and Moorgate stations. We must communicate the fact of the closure; we must explain why it is not possible to run 12 coach trains on the Thameslink route and retain the Moorgate branch; and we must help customers who are inconvenienced find the best alternative route for them.
- The anxiety that customers with disabilities will feel using a network where the train service and station layout will change over time. We will alert customers to any changes from the norm as work progresses.
- The worry that train fares will rise to fund investment of this scale. We must communicate that fares will not increase by more than they would have done anyway. We must also communicate that for two years it is guaranteed that Barbican and Moorgate customers will not be charged extra to use London Underground trains to complete their journey.

For its part, First Capital Connect is totally committed to ensuring that customers' reliance on good communications during the implementation of the Thameslink Programme is upheld. We've taken the findings and the recommendations of this Report on board. I believe we've made a good start – although we shall review the way we do things, and develop our message even further as this exciting Programme moves forward.

Karen Boswell
Customer Services Director
First Capital Connect





Southeastern Overview

The findings in this research will help us to tailor our communication and the information we provide to meet passenger's needs. It's so important to get the views of actual passengers to inform decisions about alternative travel arrangements and to find out what matters to them most.

The first phase of Thameslink work brings new journey opportunities for our passengers in south-east London to travel easily to places like St Pancras, Kentish Town, West Hampstead and as far north as Bedford, Luton and St Albans. Southeastern services to Blackfriars will be joining First Capital Connect's Thameslink route so that passengers will be able to travel between Sevenoaks and stations in north London without changing trains at Blackfriars. As a result passengers from Sevenoaks, Swanley, Bromley South, Shortlands, Catford, Denmark Hill and intermediate stations will be able to directly access destinations in north London particularly the direct link to St Pancras International. This will make it easier to interchange with services to the Midlands and north of England. It will make access to Eurostar services easier from March 2009 and Southeastern's high speed domestic services easier from December 2009.

From March 2009 the Thameslink Programme will release Networker carriages currently in use for services to and from Blackfriars and enable Southeastern to extend the length and the frequency of many trains on its wider suburban Metro routes to ease problems with crowding.

And from December 2008, Southeastern aims to provide two additional early morning services between Barnehurst and Cannon Street and one between Hayes and Cannon Street, with a fourth additional service from Hayes starting in March 2009.

So these changes are all good news for customers travelling in and out of London on some of our busiest suburban routes, with longer and more frequent trains providing extra capacity and less crowding.

Scot Reid
Head of Customer Service

Passenger Needs During Thameslink Programme Construction

Qualitative Research

Report of Findings

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Management Summary

This research was conducted to understand the impact of Thameslink Programme construction on passengers and to identify how best their needs and concerns can be addressed.

The key findings that Passenger Focus, First Capital Connect and Southeastern should note are:

1. Passengers' positive reaction to news of the Thameslink Programme greatly outweighed the concerns that were raised.
 - The positives included: a feeling that, at last, something significant is going to be done to improve their railway and they will directly benefit.
 - The negatives included: worries over disruption during construction; that 2012 is still a long way off; and that passengers will end up paying for the investment through higher fares.
2. On hearing more details, the following groups of passengers envisaged the most disruption to their current travelling arrangements.
 - Passengers travelling to Barbican and Moorgate, particularly commuting to work
 - Passengers interchanging between National Rail and London Underground at Blackfriars
 - Families travelling to/from Luton and Gatwick airports
3. The more alternative routes/alternative modes are available to passengers, the less concerned they appear to be that one is temporarily – or, in the case of the Moorgate branch permanently – removed. Passengers travelling from the south, where for many journeys there is at least one other reasonable option to reach central London, therefore appear less concerned than those travelling from the north for whom the First Capital Connect route via St. Pancras is the only practical option.

4. Effective communication with passengers, covering advice about future disruption and the alternatives available, is the single most important factor in maintaining passenger confidence in the rail industry during Thameslink construction. Passengers will find it easier to work around the disruption if an effective programme of communications is implemented. If passengers feel that they are being kept 'in the dark', it will compound all their fears based on past experience of poor communications between the railway and its customers.
5. The closure of the 'central core' (i.e. the route between St. Pancras International and London Bridge/Elephant and Castle) overnight and at weekends will impact as follows:
 - Passengers who currently catch trains to/from Farringdon, City Thameslink and Blackfriars appear likely to accept the minor inconvenience of making their own way to/from St. Pancras, London Bridge or Victoria.
 - Business passengers travelling to Luton or Gatwick airports may choose other mode (e.g. taxi or car) and expect their employer to reimburse them.
 - Families, either heading for Brighton from north of London for a day out, or travelling to/from Luton or Gatwick airports, appear likely to either not make the journey (by any mode) or may find an alternative means that gives convenience at a reasonable.
 - Although (because of difficulties in recruiting) this research did not include those using overnight trains to commute to/from work (e.g. someone starting an airport shift at 0400), it is reasonable to assume that they will be impacted more than others and that alternatives costing significantly more may not be an option for them.
6. Disabled passengers had two principle concerns:
 - That replacement bus services might be unsuitable and they may not discover this until mid-way through a journey.
 - That journey planning may become more difficult, for example keeping abreast of the changing layout of a station subject to major reconstruction.
7. Passengers have concerns that are both rational (e.g. longer journey times) and emotional (e.g. additional stress, wider impact on family life). At the very least the rail industry should acknowledge awareness of these emotional concerns and ideally attempt to understand and address them.

Conclusions

This research indicates that the rail industry should focus on delivering against an identified hierarchy of needs, as follows:

- **Ensure throughout the period of works that disruption is kept to a minimum.**
- **Be seen to be providing alternative modes of transport, at least initially (although the reality may be that these are not heavily used).**
- **Be seen to be coordinating effectively with London Underground and other TOCs over planned works.**
- **Continue to communicate the importance of a phased approach.**
- **Develop a communications strategy to, first, exploit the good news behind the investment, then to inform in more detail about the exact nature of the disruption in a targeted manner.**

1. Research Context & Objectives

Passenger Focus, the independent national rail consumer watchdog, takes very seriously its responsibility to ensure that the needs and well-being of rail passengers are always considered by the government and rail industry.

In line with its mission of 'putting rail passengers first' this research project was commissioned by Passenger Focus, in partnership with First Capital Connect and Southeastern, to understand passengers' concerns about how their day to day travel may be affected by construction works taking place as the Thameslink Programme gets underway.

Additionally, the research sought to identify any practical steps the rail industry could take to minimise the potentially negative impact of these works on rail passengers.

The specific objectives of this research project were:

1. To introduce passengers on affected routes to news of the Thameslink Programme and associated construction work and to evaluate their initial reactions.
2. To identify and understand the full range of passenger concerns at a spontaneous level and to indicate a prioritisation of these.
3. At a prompted level, to assess the issues likely to result in the greatest concern and frustration to passengers during the construction work period.
4. To identify what practical steps passengers expect TOCs, partners and stakeholders to take in advance, in order to minimise the negative impact of the timetable changes.
5. To understand the extent to which the needs of passengers are likely to be met by what can realistically be delivered by the parties concerned.
6. To provide the rail industry with insight as to how it can best maintain passenger satisfaction during this period (or how to contain and mitigate dissatisfaction).
7. To provide an early indication of the nature and extent of the information needs of the different user groups before and during the period of disruption.

In line with previous projects conducted for Passenger Focus, it was explained to all respondents as part of the moderator's introduction that their ideas and suggestions would be used to shape decisions, but that the rail industry was not committing to implement a particular solution simply because it has been suggested during research.

2. Methodology & Sample

A mixed methodology comprising focus groups and depth interviews was employed to meet the research objectives. The sample was constructed to represent a broad cross-section of rail passengers in order to reflect the views of various user groups travelling at peak and off peak times. The sample encompassed commuters, leisure users, business users and mobility-impaired passengers, as well as those with hearing and vision impairments and wheelchair users. The research included a spread of journey length (inner and outer sections of the Thameslink route were covered), age and socio-economic group.

Fieldwork was conducted in Camden Town, Totteridge, East Croydon, London Blackfriars and Brighton in May 2008. Full details of the sample structure are outlined below:

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

- **Group one:** daily commuters using First Capital Connect services during peak hours to Barbican or Moorgate stations from the following stations: Bedford, St. Albans, Kentish Town and West Hampstead (Thameslink).
- **Group two:** daily commuters using First Capital Connect or Southeastern services during peak times to travel into Blackfriars where they interchange onto London Underground services.
- **Group three:** mix of business and leisure passengers using First Capital Connect or Southeastern services to travel off peak into Blackfriars where they interchange onto London Underground services.
- **Group four:** passengers travelling out of London from 9:00pm onwards (any day of the week) who are travelling to stations between St. Albans and Bedford on First Capital Connect services.
- **Group five:** passengers travelling out of London / London Blackfriars from 9:00pm onwards (any weekday) using First Capital Connect services to travel to stations between East Croydon and Brighton and also stations on the Wimbledon Loop.
- **Group six:** weekend travellers using First Capital Connect services to travel to/from London using stations between East Croydon and Brighton, St. Albans and Bedford and stations on the Wimbledon Loop.
- **Group seven:** mix of business and leisure passengers travelling to/from Gatwick or Luton Airports using First Capital Connect services on any day of the week.

- **Group eight***: leisure passengers who are making journeys on Saturdays or Sundays travelling through the 'central core' but not alighting within central London (defined as St. Pancras International, Farringdon, City Thameslink, Blackfriars, London Bridge and Elephant & Castle).
- **Group nine***: mix of business and leisure passengers travelling on late night services using First Capital Connect on any day of the week between midnight and 6:00am.

*Due to some issues recruiting respondents for groups eight and nine, these were combined into one session. In addition, we supplemented this session with a couple of depth interviews amongst those travelling from south to north via the central core at weekends and on late night services.

Depth interviews

As well as the eight focus groups and 2 depth interviews outlined above, a further nine depth interviews were conducted (60 minutes each) among the following passenger groups:

- Passengers with impaired vision.
- Passengers with impaired hearing.
- Wheelchair users and mobility-impaired passengers.

Depth interviews were conducted in London and the South East and reflected the user segments specified for the group discussions.

Additional recruitment criteria employed:

- Mix of both sexes in each group and across the depths.
- Representation of age groups and lifestages as appropriate to each of the passenger categories, e.g. mothers with (pre) school age children, retired/grandparents etc.
- Mix of social grades to reflect the profile of the local population and rail user groups (e.g. BC1; C2D).
- Frequent and infrequent rail users.
- Those who use season tickets and who purchase tickets daily.

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

3. Main Findings

3.1 The Thameslink Programme

3.1.1 Initial awareness and reactions to the Thameslink Programme

As in previous research undertaken on the Thameslink Programme, in order to give respondents some background and context, all were exposed to an overview of what the project will entail. Prior to this however, it was important to understand what respondents spontaneously knew about the Thameslink Programme and these findings are outlined in the section below.

3.1.2 Spontaneous knowledge and awareness

Overall, given the proximity of the planned works, there was some surprise amongst passengers that they do not already know more about the Thameslink Programme. Indeed, overall there was very little spontaneous awareness of the Programme.

Only a very small minority of respondents recalled hearing about long promised works on Thameslink routes, and this tended to be in relation to the lengthening of trains and new rolling stock.

However, passengers with disabilities seemed to know more about the Thameslink Programme. This seems to have been due to the fact that they have a heightened awareness of rail issues in general due to their closer relationships with TOCs (e.g. through a disability advisor or support group). In terms of what they know, many were aware of the specific details of the Thameslink Programme including rolling stock upgrades, the closure of the Moorgate branch, platform lengthening, the planned closure of the central core and upgrades to help accessibility.

3.1.3 Details of the Thameslink Programme

The details of the Thameslink Programme, as introduced to respondents in all focus groups and depth interviews, are outlined below.

- The Thameslink Programme is a £3.5 billion* investment by Government to provide more capacity to meet existing and future passenger demand.
- 12 coach trains will replace 4 and 8 coach trains between Bedford and Brighton and on other Thameslink routes.
- Up to 24 trains per hour will be able to pass through London at peak times.
- Rebuilding work will be carried out in phases at stations including London Bridge, Farringdon and Blackfriars.
- Brand new trains will start running in 2012, with the full fleet in service from December 2015.

* £3.5 billion, the cost of Thameslink Programme without taking account of the new trains, was quoted in error – it should have been £5.5 billion.

3.1.4 Passenger Reactions to the Thameslink Programme

Upon exposure to the details of the Thameslink Programme as presented above, the main reaction was to welcome the investment in the rail infrastructure on the Thameslink route. The consensus was that this is good news for rail passengers, albeit in the longer term, in that they will receive a better service and newer trains. Most are happy to see what they think amounts to major and much needed investment in their route, although there is some surprise at how much it will cost overall.

Key reservations were highlighted at this stage regarding:

- cost and who is to pay for the Thameslink Programme,
- the disruption the works will cause to passengers
- the length of time scheduled to introduce the new rolling stock, which was perceived to be too long

These more negative perceptions seem to have stemmed from the previous poor experiences passengers have had of the rail industry, for example previous programmes of works that have been disruptive and costly such as the St Pancras International development.

Positive reactions

We have collated from the initial reactions of respondents to the Thameslink Programme all of their more positive reactions and there are some overall themes that emerge. These relate to the experience of travelling, a more forward thinking approach by the rail industry and the level of investment being made. For some passengers, the perceived improvements to the service delivery are almost too good to be true, although the overall consensus is that these are much-needed improvements.

Service improvements and enhanced passenger experience

It is seen as particularly good news that overcrowding and congestion will be reduced by having longer trains, more frequent and quicker trains - all of which would, it was hoped, result in quicker journey times. Resolving what some perceive to be 'dangerous' capacity issues at Blackfriars is also seen as a major positive, albeit that some feel this is long overdue. Better accessibility was also welcomed by those in our sample who have disabilities.

*"Trains will have more carriages and that can only be a good thing."
[Moorgate/Barbican]*

*"Having 12 coaches will improve it as it will make it a more comfortable journey for all of us."
[After 9pm North]*

Forward thinking approach

Whilst respondents understand that large scale works will need to take place, they are pleased to see that the rail industry is being forward thinking by taking on board passenger opinions at this stage. Respondents also welcomed the proposal to phase works, so as to minimise possible disruption. It was even suggested that if the Thameslink Programme was successful other TOCs could potentially use it as a model for their own works in the future.

*"They've been talking about doing something like this for ages so it's about time they got round to it because that route needs upgrading"
[After 9pm South]*

Investment

The fact that the cost of Thameslink Programme is seen as surprisingly high by many passengers leads to a perception that this is a serious investment into their network. Passengers obviously liked the fact that money is going to be spent on the part of the rail network that they use, and that they will themselves be able to reap the benefits.

“Undoubtedly it is going to affect us but we can’t really moan if it will benefit us in the end.”

[Blackfriars Commuter]

“It’s good that they are making these improvements – it is positive that they are moving forwards in this way.”

[Blackfriars Off-Peak]

Negative reactions

We also collated more negative reactions to the Thameslink Programme using a similar approach, and it is worth noting that although several negatives emerged, the benefits were felt to far outweigh the drawbacks before respondents were exposed to the details of the likely disruption. The main themes to emerge from the negative reactions are expressed below.

Disruption

As well as a general fear of disruption to their journeys, passengers also raised some more specific concerns during the research sessions. First, there was some uncertainty over what routes can be used during the disruption and not knowing where congestion is likely to be highest. Second, it was assumed that there will be very localised disruption at certain stations if platforms are lengthened.

Whilst passengers are typically understanding of the fact that there will inevitably be some disruption, lack of exposure to the details at this stage of the sessions led to some over exaggeration of their concerns – this however provides an early indication of the importance of frequent and clear communications on disruption.

Outcome of Thameslink Programme

Whilst the overall benefits concerning service improvements and an enhanced passenger experience are apparent to many, some voiced more specific concerns about the new rolling stock – namely that the new trains may have fewer seats and more standing room than at present and that longer trains may take longer to board and disembark.

“The trains are going to be packed full of commuters at peak times because there will be less seats.”

[Moorgate/Barbican]

Impact on infrastructure and environment

There is a question for some over whether certain stations will be able to cope with more trains and longer trains. There is a desire for reassurances that the new infrastructure will be able to bear the extra load. A small minority of passengers also wondered about the potential negative impact of the Thameslink Programme on the environment and questioned both the necessity of the works and whether anything was being done to offset the impact.

*“There will be huge disruption but it is something we will just have to put up with.
We will have to go through the pain in order to derive the benefit”
[After 9pm South]*

Timeframe

For many, 2012 feels like a long time off to start to feel the benefits of the Programme, and 2015 even longer. The issue for passengers here is that by this time, the rail network may be experiencing even greater demand due to an increasing influx of people into London. Some also expect the Programme to overrun and not be completed on time. This was largely based on negative perceptions of other major infrastructure programmes undertaken in the UK, the rail industry and beyond, e.g. Wembley Stadium.

Paying for the investment

There is a suspicion amongst many passengers that they will end up paying for the Thameslink Programme themselves through an increase in fares. Understandably there was some resistance to this on the occasions it was raised, especially in the context of discussions surrounding the disruption that passengers are likely to experience.

*“They had better not put up the fares in January because I am not going to be receiving a complete service. In fact there should be some sort of compensation.”
[Blackfriars Commuter]*

*“It’s one of those things that sounds great at first until you realise that we will end up paying for it, like the Olympics”
[After 9pm South]*

3.2 Impact of Thameslink Programme on Passenger Journeys

3.2.1 Details of timetable changes and construction works

While the Thameslink Programme will deliver major benefits to passengers in the long term, there will be significant disruption along the way for passengers travelling on existing services. The timetable changes and station closures which will take place to facilitate the construction work from December 2008 were presented to all respondents as follows.

- Permanent closure of Farringdon to Moorgate route, following a formal “statutory closure” process involving public consultation & subsequent endorsement by government.
- Closure of the London Underground station (District & Circle) at Blackfriars from March 2009 for approximately 3 years.
- Closure of the ‘central core’ of the route (the section between St Pancras International & London Bridge/Elephant & Castle) between 10:30pm-4:30am every night from January 2009 for 2 years.
- Significant additional planned engineering work on top of the overnight closures of the ‘central core’, e.g. there will be no services through the ‘central core’ on 33 of 52 weekends in year one of the works.
- As a result of these works, punctuality is forecast to deteriorate.

In fact, Blackfriars London Underground station will close for approximately 2.5 years, from March 2009.

3.2.2 Overview of reactions by passenger type

As expected, passengers currently using Barbican, Moorgate and Blackfriars (particularly those using them for work) feel that they will be the most inconvenienced by the Thameslink Programme works. Also, families travelling to and from airports feel that the timetable changes and construction works will have a major impact on their rail travel. Those travelling through the central core at weekends and evenings seemed generally to feel less affected by the closures and disruption, primarily because of the range of alternative travel options open to them. Similarly, business airport passengers are able to resort to other modes of transport with little perceived personal inconvenience. Disabled respondents typically tended to express less overt frustration with the impact the Programme will have on their day to day travelling, perhaps because they are used to having to pre-plan their journeys with greater precision than other passenger groups.

The next section will take each passenger group in turn and explain their initial reaction to the timetable changes, how their journeys will be affected and will show examples of alternative routes they have suggested they may take.

3.3 Impact of journeys on passengers

3.3.1 Moorgate/Barbican Users

Focus group one: daily commuters using First Capital Connect services during peak hours to Barbican or Moorgate stations from the following stations: Bedford, St. Albans, Kentish Town and West Hampstead (Thameslink).

Initially, passengers using this branch were shocked about its closure and there was some anger expressed at a decision they do not particularly understand. However, once they were over the initial shock, the inconvenience of having to switch to a less preferred mode of transport, and a longer journey time were met with an air of resigned acceptance. They realised that ultimately there was little they were able to do about the decision and some were mindful of the longer term benefits.

Initial Reactions

Beyond some stating that they did not believe it is necessary to close this branch, passengers expressed two key concerns.

First, whether the branch closure will affect fares - for example, whether they will have to pay extra⁺ to complete their journey to Barbican or Moorgate via London Underground. Also, at a higher level some wondered whether their fares would increase on this route to fund the Thameslink Programme works.

*“My big question is this: Will our fares go up as a result?”
[Blackfriars Commuter]*

Second, this feels like a lot of disruption affecting many people, leading to questions over whether it is worth it just for longer trains. In addition, some respondents questioned why there cannot be a higher frequency of eight coach trains running to these stations as an alternative.

“Why can’t they just have more 8 coach trains and increase the frequency of them?”
[Moorgate/Barbican]

Who is Most Affected

All users of the Moorgate branch feel that they will be affected, in particular commuters and those using the branch for work purposes. Those who do not work close to Farringdon will now have to find an alternative mode of transport at the very least for the last part of their journey.

How Journeys will be Affected

Some passengers claimed that they would take alternative modes of transport (often the Underground) for the entire journey, whilst others will be seeking an alternative mode only for the last part of their journey (from Farringdon). The overall journey will often be longer and there may be an additional cost⁺ to using the alternative modes of transport, especially if more than one mode of transport is now used. Some female passengers expressed concern at the knock-on implications on childcare arrangements if punctuality is forecast to deteriorate and journey times extended.

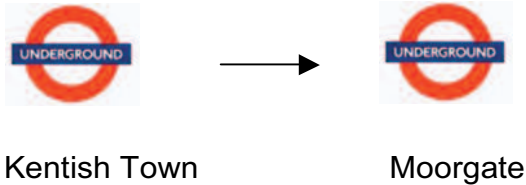
⁺ Respondents were informed later in the sessions that First Capital Connect tickets to Barbican and Moorgate will be valid on the Underground to those stations for 24 months following closure of the branch.

“I will have to get the tube and change at Highbury and Islington. It will be a slower journey though and the tube will be packed so I’m not looking forward to it.”
[Moorgate/Barbican]

“I will get the Metropolitan Line from Finchley Road to Farringdon, but it is going to affect me dropping my daughter off at school and I’ll have to re-juggle my morning a bit. But I would rather switch to the tube than have to deal with fluctuating punctuality.”
[Moorgate/Barbican]

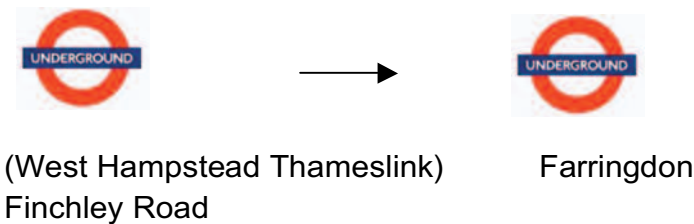
Examples of Alternative Routes Suggested by Passengers Travelling to Barbican/Moorgate

Example Route 1:



Some passengers who live closer to Kentish Town would simply travel from this station to Moorgate using the Underground. Whilst this is not their preferred mode of transport (due to overcrowding on the Northern Line at rush hour and perceived lack of comfort) they do recognise that it is a viable and fairly easy alternative.

Example Route 2:



Some passengers unable to travel into Moorgate claim they would use the Underground from Finchley Road, rather than First Capital Connect from West Hampstead, taking the Metropolitan Line to either Farringdon or Moorgate depending which is closer to their final destination .

Example Route 3:



Some passengers travelling from St Albans who need to get to Moorgate think they will disembark First Capital Connect services at Farringdon and use London Underground services to Moorgate.

In summary, it appears that if a reasonable alternative route/mode is available many passengers will opt for it. However there are those, perhaps without a ready alternative, who are prepared to take their chances interchanging with London

Underground at Farringdon in the short term. If they experience unpalatable heavy congestion within the station they will then change their route.

“I think they are going to need to ease the pressure at Farringdon and work with London Underground to make sure there are more tubes going through.”
[Female, Moorgate/Barbican]

3.3.2 Blackfriars Users

Focus group two: daily commuters using First Capital Connect or Southeastern services during peak times to travel into Blackfriars where they interchange onto London Underground services.

Focus group three: mix of business and leisure passengers using First Capital Connect or Southeastern services to travel off peak into Blackfriars where they interchange onto London Underground services.

Many passengers travelling into Blackfriars had at least one viable alternative route they could take, thus lessening the potential impact of the disruption on their travel and on their perceptions.

Note: Passengers using Blackfriars National Rail station as their destination/origin station (i.e. not interchanging with London Underground) were not part of this group. They will be impacted daily by the challenges of using a station that is a building site, rather than actually have change their journey.

Initial Reactions

First, there is surprise that the London Underground station will be closed for approximately three years, which feels like a long time to implement changes that will ultimately result in longer trains. However, when they rationalise this further there is an understanding of the need to rebuild the station in order to resolve current high levels of congestion. This is a good example of where the initial ‘knee jerk’ reaction to such changes and disruption can often seem worse than the reality.

“Closing the Underground for 3 years is frankly unbelievable.”
[Blackfriars Off-Peak]

“It is incredible that Blackfriars Underground will have to shut for 3 whole years. This will have a terrible impact on commuters.”
[Blackfriars Commuter]

“The ticket barriers at Blackfriars Underground are really quite dangerous at rush hour. There are so many people crammed into such a tiny space.”
[Blackfriars Commuter]

“I think I was a bit shocked when you first told me this, but it is not actually that inconvenient – it just lessens my options, that’s all.”
[Blackfriars Off-Peak]

Who is Most Affected

Two main groups of people will be affected by the London Underground station closure.

- Commuters, who will be more affected than leisure users as they have less flexibility over the time of their journey .
- Those unable to travel into Victoria as an alternative to Blackfriars, who will feel the effects of the closure more than those who have a choice between the two stations when travelling from the South.

How Journeys will be Affected

Some respondents are happy to walk from Blackfriars, unless it is raining. Others plan to take their existing or an alternative TOC to Victoria. Overall, the impact on journey time is felt to be negligible for most due to the number of alternatives available for Blackfriars users. There was minimal perceived need or desire for help with walking routes etc. expressed during this research.

“I may still go to Blackfriars and walk to Mansion House, but only if it is a nice day, not if it is lashing down with rain.”
[Blackfriars Commuter]

“I’d find it pretty patronising if they gave me information on how to walk to my office from Blackfriars because they have messed up my onward journey.”
[Blackfriars Commuter]

Examples of Alternative Routes Suggested by Passengers when Blackfriars London Underground station is closed

Example Route 1:



For those travelling into Blackfriars on Southeastern services, many claim they will disembark and walk or take the bus to complete their journey.

Example Route 2:



For passengers travelling from Bromley South, some claim they will travel to Victoria on Southeastern services and use London Underground services to complete their journeys. This however depends on how close their final destination is to Victoria.

Example Route 3:



For passengers travelling from Beckenham Junction and working in the City, some claim they will take the option of disembarking Southeastern services at Elephant & Castle and taking London Underground services to Old Street instead.

Passengers travelling from the North to Blackfriars claim they will typically disembark at Kings Cross St Pancras and travel onwards on the Underground, or in some cases may take the slow train to West Hampstead before connecting with the Underground.

"I reckon I will just go to Kings Cross or Farringdon and change there, no doubt along with thousands of others! We shall just have to see how it goes."

[Blackfriars Commuter]

*“Because I tend to use the train for more leisure journeys, this won’t affect me as much. I’ll change at Kings Cross I think.”
[Blackfriars Off-Peak]*

3.3.3 Out of London after 9:00pm

Group four: passengers travelling out of London from 9:00pm onwards (any day of the week) who are travelling to stations between St. Albans and Bedford on First Capital Connect services.

Group five: passengers travelling out of London / London Blackfriars from 9:00pm onwards (any weekday) using First Capital Connect services to travel to stations between East Croydon and Brighton and also stations on the Wimbledon Loop.

Group six: weekend travellers using First Capital Connect services to travel to/from London using stations between East Croydon and Brighton, St. Albans and Bedford and stations on the Wimbledon Loop.

Group nine: mix of business and leisure passengers travelling on late night services using First Capital Connect on any day of the week between midnight and 6:00am.

These respondents recognised that they were unlikely to be as severely affected as other passenger groups by the Thameslink Programme works. At worst, the anticipated impact of the works will be a slight inconvenience that will require some minor reorganisation of social plans.

*“It would hardly affect me at all. As long as I can get to London Bridge I will be able to get my train from there”
[After 9pm South]*

Initial Reactions

This user group tended to acknowledge that the proposed disruption sounded worse than it is likely to be in reality. They recognised that the changes would affect them mainly on a social basis when going out for drinks and meals after work. They agreed that the impact of the work would be lessened if they were made aware of what is happening in advance and were able to plan alternative venues or routes home. However, in some instances we encountered passengers for whom other journeys they make on the Thameslink route would be affected more significantly than those out of London after 9:00pm. For example, taking the family to Brighton for the weekend.

Who is Most Affected

Although not encountered during this research, those who work shifts will clearly experience greater difficulties with their journeys after 10:30pm. Aside from shift workers, the greatest impact is likely to be felt by business users who need to travel home, having worked late or been away on business.

“It would make you concerned about missing the last train, especially for an older person or someone who doesn’t travel by public transport very often”
[After 9pm South]

How Journeys will be Affected

There were three main alternatives highlighted by those whose journeys will be affected as follows. Some would be likely to use an alternative TOC (where available) e.g. East Midlands after taking the Underground or bus to St Pancras; the desire to do this lessened significantly when it was emphasised that First Capital Connect trains would still be running north from St Pancras. A small minority claimed they may take an alternative mode of transport for the entire journey e.g. their car; and others claimed they would simply need to ensure that they had left the central core before 10.30pm – thereby curtailing their social activities slightly. However the majority were relaxed about the minor inconvenience of making their way to St. Pancras, London Bridge, or Victoria, for example, rather than being able to board at Blackfriars Thameslink, or Farringdon. Given that all recognised that they had many alternative options available to them within the central core area of London if necessary, none expressed any interest in the possibility of using a replacement bus service for these journeys. The perception is that a replacement bus would be slow as it would have to stop at all the stations and would be less frequent than the Underground.

“They are basically telling you that you have to be home at 10:30 which is a bit like being in a prison, but it won’t do my liver any harm!”
[After 9pm South]

“It won’t affect me workwise, but I am a bit concerned about getting home late for the kids.”
[After 9pm South]

“After 11:30pm would be better as it is going to be a bit of a squeeze to always get there for 10:30pm.”
[After 9pm North]

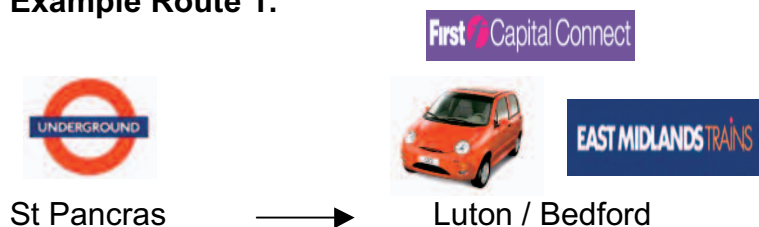
“It will curtail my evenings out but I am more worried about the forecast downturn in punctuality as there are only so many times you can be late for work.”
[After 9pm South]

“It could be a bit of a pain but as long as I can get to Kings Cross I should be ok to get to my boyfriend’s house.”
[After 9pm North]

“Oh no, not the rail replacement buses! We have them when there are problems on the Northern Line and they are horrible – they take ages.”
[After 9pm North]

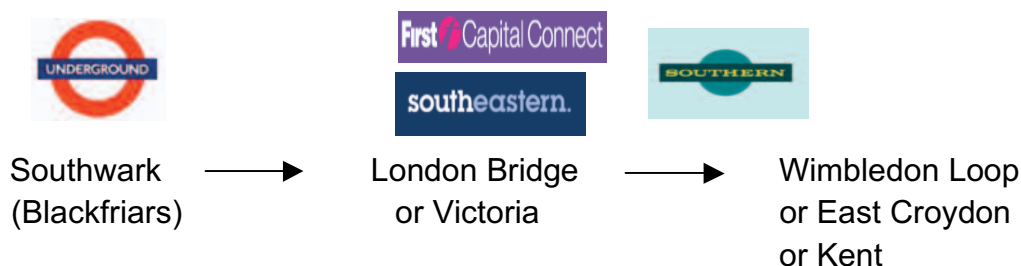
Examples of Alternative Routes Suggested by Passengers who would normally use the central core after 9.00pm

Example Route 1:



For those travelling out of London after 9:00pm towards Luton and Bedford, the following solutions were discussed. Most would simply travel by Underground (or bus) to St Pancras International and take whichever train was most convenient for them from there. One or two claimed that they might consider the option of bringing their car into London in order to make the return journey easier after a night out, albeit that this would mean they are unable to drink alcohol.

Example Route 2:



Those travelling South out of London after 9:00pm suggested a similar approach. Those close to Blackfriars would use Southwark tube station or Waterloo (East) to get to Victoria or London Bridge and from there would take the first convenient train to get them home. It is important to note here that choice of TOC from Victoria or London Bridge would be made purely based on which train is the most convenient – there is no TOC loyalty.

3.3.4 Out of London at Weekends

Group six: weekend travellers using First Capital Connect services to travel to/from London using stations between East Croydon and Brighton, St. Albans and Bedford and stations on the Wimbledon Loop.

Encouragingly, even those making work-related journeys at the weekend claimed the construction work would have fairly minimal impact provided they have sufficient notice.

Initial Reactions

Reactions were very similar to those expressed by the group travelling out of London after 9:00pm. After taking time to think about the effect the works would have on them, they felt the impact would be minimal if they were given sufficient notice to plan alternatives.

“My journeys into town at the weekend will definitely be affected, but I do have more of the luxury of time then so it is not so bad.”

[Weekend Traveller]

There is little surprise that work such as this will be carried out at the weekend, and many drew on their recent experiences of the central core closures by way of comparison and context for the ensuing discussions.

“There have been closures on that line at weekends recently but you get used to it after a while and can easily work around it”

[Weekend Traveller]

There was some discussion in this group about the timing of the work possibly being an issue. It was feared that the Thameslink work will coincide with other transport projects being undertaken in preparation for the 2012 Olympics; potentially increasing the extent of the overall disruption to their lives.

“I don’t know whether the timing is intended to be ready in time for the Olympics but there will be lots of other disruption in London in the build up to 2012”

[Weekend Traveller]

Who is Most Affected

Passengers making essential and work-related journeys will be most affected, rather than those travelling for leisure purposes. The main concern for many of these respondents was whether there would be any disruption at their local station, rather than the consequences for the central core at the weekends.

“If the trains are going to be longer it will involve lengthening the platforms at my local station so there is bound to be lots of disruption while that is happening. Will they need to close my station to do that work?”

[Weekend Traveller]

How Journeys will be Affected

There were three main alternatives discussed, including the possibility of driving (as there is no congestion charge at the weekend). Some claimed they would make fewer journeys and others will work around the timetable changes and seek out alternative routes.

“I sometimes have to work at the weekend and I usually drive in. There is no traffic on the road and no Congestion Charge”

[Weekend Traveller]

“When I travel at weekends its always for leisure purposes so I would just make fewer journeys or spend more time planning the journey when I do travel”

[Weekend Traveller]

“I don’t know what I would do but it wouldn’t be a big deal. I sometimes go by car anyway so I would just have to do that more often”

[Weekend Travellers]

Rather than providing alternative examples of specific journeys, those who continue to use public transport simply claimed that it would not be difficult for them to find ways of avoiding the central core by using the Underground or bus networks at the weekend.

“It’s always a reduced service at the weekend however you travel so it wouldn’t make much difference if I had to use an alternative method of transport”

[Weekend Traveller]

3.3.5 Airport Users

Group seven: mix of business and leisure passengers travelling to/from Gatwick or Luton Airports using First Capital Connect services on any day of the week.

Travelling to and from airports for many people participating in this research was an infrequent experience occurring two to three times a year. Planning the best route to get to the airport with time to spare is key for this group in any case, so extra planning as a result of the Thameslink Programme works was not seen as too much of an imposition.

Initial Reactions

As with other user groups, this group expect greater disruption than there is likely to be for them in reality. Respondents plan to work around the Thameslink Programme timetable changes, using a combination of other modes of transport. In addition to this, they plan to build up a knowledge of alternatives and back ups which they can use as and when they need to.

“I don’t want to have to guess all the time. I need to know if a journey that used to be an hour is now timetabled to be an hour and twenty minutes because I can work around that and think about other ways for me and co-workers to get places”
(Airport User)

Families and business travellers expect to face different issues which are expanded upon below.

Who is Most Affected

The participants in this group all make journeys to the airport from North London stations such as Hendon, Borehamwood and Potters Bar. Of all the airports, travelling to Gatwick is expected to be the most difficult during the period of disruption.

Families are concerned about the extra costs associated with using alternative routes e.g. taking a family on the Gatwick Express is often seen as prohibitively expensive. They will also no longer be able to travel to Gatwick Airport directly on one train. The perception is that changing onto different modes of transport while travelling with children, buggies and suitcases is likely to make their journey more stressful.

“I can’t say I’m looking forward to taking two tubes and then an overground train, with two kids, suitcases and a buggy”
(Airport User)

Business travellers’ concerns are not driven by cost as they expect this to be covered by their work. Their concerns are more about the time the journey will take, overrunning of works and the quality of connections to and from airports from London stations.

“I take early morning flights to Newcastle a few times a month. I have to make sure I make the flight, so I may look at a hotel at the airport the evening before”
(Airport User)

How Journeys will be Affected

The following views were expressed about alternative arrangements.

Business

- stay in a hotel at the airport before an early flight
- plan to travel via multiple alternative modes of transport (e.g. Underground and National Rail)
- drive and park
- take a taxi

Families

- plan to travel using multiple alternative modes of transport
- drive and park
- ask a family member to drive them

Note: cost concerns mean families will consider a wider range of alternatives than just the train.

Examples of Alternative Routes Suggested by Passengers travelling to/from Airports

Example Route 1:



Arnos Grove ———▶ St Pancras ———▶ Victoria ———▶ Gatwick
Hendon/ Mill Hill International

Passengers travelling from North London stations such as Hendon and Mill Hill to Gatwick will either travel via First Capital Connect to St Pancras International, or by London Underground from Arnos Grove to St Pancras. Once at St Pancras, they will travel to Victoria by London Underground and board either the Gatwick Express or a Southern train to Gatwick Airport.

*“I’ll have to make sure I know all the alternatives and how much each of them will cost as it will be more expensive if I start having to get cabs to the tube”
(Airport User)*

Example Route 2:



Elstree —————> Luton Airport Pkwy —————> Luton Airport

Passengers travelling from Elstree suggest that they may be more inclined to use Luton Airport during the period of disruption as it may be more accessible. One option is to drive from Elstree to Luton Airport and park. Another option is to board First Capital Connect services at Elstree to Luton Airport Parkway and then connect to the terminal using the shuttle bus. Respondents were unable to decide at this stage which of these options they may take.

*“I can see Luton becoming more important to me for business in Europe. I’ll just jump in the car and park off-site. If I can’t, the trains to Luton don’t seem as affected anyway”
(Airport User)*

3.3.6 Central Core Users

Group eight: leisure passengers who are making journeys on Saturdays or Sundays travelling through the ‘central core’ but not alighting within central London (defined as St. Pancras International, Farringdon, City Thameslink, Blackfriars, London Bridge and Elephant & Castle).

Group nine: mix of business and leisure passengers travelling on late night services using First Capital Connect on any day of the week between midnight and 6:00am.

The respondents we saw in this research felt it would not be too difficult for them to work around the disruption caused by closure of the central core during evenings and some weekends as long as they had sufficient notice. However, it is important to point out that there maybe others for whom this will be more difficult and whose views were not represented because of the difficulties in recruiting passengers who travel overnight (e.g. night shift workers).

Initial Reactions

On first hearing about the timetable changes, passengers expected and feared total disruption to their current journeys. Some (wrongly) assumed that the

Thameslink network would close down completely at the affected times and felt unsure about how they would cope in this situation. Others were simply shocked at the scale of the works, although this was naturally exacerbated by this misunderstanding.

“Does that mean that the whole thing would close down completely? I can’t believe that would be necessary ”

[Central Core]

Who is Most Affected

Those travelling from the North to South side of the central core feel most affected as they have fewer alternatives than those travelling from the South. Additionally, leisure travellers are likely to be more inconvenienced than business travellers who will not be so concerned about the financial implications of alternatives.

“I need to travel through London at weekends and late at night for my work so I will be completely stuffed.”

[Central Core]

“If I have to get a taxi all the way to Gatwick it won’t bother me because my company will pay for it if they want me to be on an early flight”

[Central Core]

How Journeys will be Affected

These respondents suggest they are more likely to take an alternative mode for the whole journey and take the relevant TOC out of the equation completely rather than risk other or unplanned disruption through the central core.

“Even if I could use another method through London I wouldn’t risk using the train at all if I had a flight to catch. I would prefer to drive or get someone to take me”

[Central Core]

Examples of Alternative Routes Suggested by Passengers Travelling at Weekends and Overnight

Example Route 1:



Passengers travelling from North London to Gatwick suggested a number of options available to them. These include: using London Underground services from St Pancras to Victoria to connect with Southern services or the Gatwick Express; taking a taxi for the whole journey (mainly business users); driving themselves or getting a lift the whole way or taking a replacement bus (although airport users expressed concerns about the reliability of this).

“Would the bus replacement be for the whole journey or just through London? Either way it would take longer but I suppose I would be prepared to give it a go”
[Central Core]

Example Route 2:



North London —————> Brighton

Passengers travelling from North London to destinations other than Gatwick suggested they would experiment with a combination of the Underground and / or buses to connect with Southern or Southeastern trains from Victoria or London Bridge.

“I go clubbing a lot in central London so I will have to start getting a bus to Victoria or London Bridge which will be a pain at first but I’m sure I will get used to it”
[Central Core]

3.3.7 Disabled Users

Nine depth interviews were conducted among the following passenger groups - passengers with impaired vision, passengers with impaired hearing, wheelchair users and mobility-impaired users.

Disabled passengers are typically more concerned about the practicalities of using the route, rather than focusing negatively on the disruption. Thus, they tend to view the Thameslink Programme from a more practical and positive perspective than other user groups.

Initial Reactions

There are two key concerns expressed by disabled passengers. First, there is concern that replacement services will be unsuitable for their requirements, and that they will find this out through trial and error which may be uncomfortable for them. Additionally, there is concern that they will experience a higher level of

difficulty than usual due to the scale of the work – for example, journey planning will be more difficult, as will accessibility at disrupted stations.

“What happens if I get to the door of a replacement coach and there are steps – I’m in an electric wheelchair and you can’t just fold them up. I need to know how accessible each alternative route is for me”

(Wheelchair User)

Disabled participants in this research expect to become increasingly dependent throughout the period of the works on online information and also literature which they hope will be further developed to take into account their disability.

Who is Most Affected

Wheelchair users and mobility-impaired passengers cite problems with accessing London Underground platforms, due to the need to travel up and down stairs. Thus, those user groups would find it harder using the Underground as a viable alternative mode.

Vision-impaired and hearing-impaired passengers will become increasingly reliant on quality information supplied visually and audibly. Herein lies a considerable challenge for stakeholders in the Thameslink Programme and one which is further discussed at length in the sections of this report which deal with communications.

How Journeys will be Affected

Disabled passengers will aim to plan their journeys more during the construction works and will investigate accessibility at a wider range of stations. They are also keen to know about the suitability of replacement services, for example disabled access buses which may take them to main train stations.

Ultimately, the times at which they will travel will also be affected as there is a desire to travel at times when there will be less disruption.

Requirements by Disability

A key requirement for all disabled passenger groups is to avoid unplanned and difficult scenarios which they have experienced in the past. Examples here include steps and long walks underground which can create feelings of anxiety and vulnerability (particularly among those with mobility problems).

All disabled users will need to have easily accessible information on alternative transport such as taxis and replacement coach services. It is expected this information will be available online and at train stations.

First Capital Connect currently produce detailed booklets for disabled users and some were aware of this. Disabled passengers would like First Capital Connect to revise these booklets and build into them accessibility information for the duration of the Thameslink Programme.

Vision-impaired passengers would like information to be relayed through audio announcements so alternative routes can be planned. Additionally, an alert service via mobile phone for affected services could be available while travelling.

“I’d like to be able to hear the audio announcements as soon as I get to the station and again on the platform as they are not always working, and it will be more important for people like me over the next few years”
(Vision Impaired)

Hearing-impaired passengers would like information to be relayed in writing on boards and real time displays to aid journey planning.

“If there are notices around the station and notes on the boards I will make sure I read them – it will save me looking for the staff too ”
(Hearing Impaired)

Mobility-impaired passengers plan to have an enhanced knowledge of suitable alternative routes in the case of last minute changes, so as to avoid long walks and steps underground. They would also like access to assistance and advice to be available over the course of the journey to prevent a ‘trial and error’ experience.

“I find some of the walks on the Underground quite difficult already, so if I need to walk outside stations, or use escalators that move quickly on routes that I don’t know then I won’t like it. ”
(Mobility Impaired)

Wheelchair passengers would like station and platform accessibility information to be provided specifically for wheelchair users who may need to incorporate a wider number of stations into their route than they are currently familiar with.

“I don’t want to have to find out what I can and can’t do by trying to make journeys myself, I would like to be able to use a booklet or the internet to make sure that I will be able to make the journey”
(Wheelchair User)

3.4 Passenger Concerns and Needs

3.4.1 Overview – Journey impact

In addition to understanding what alternative journeys passengers would consider making when faced with the Thameslink Programme disruption, it was important to understand how they felt the construction works and timetable changes would impact their day to day lives.

Passenger needs and concerns can be represented in two ways. On the one hand the impact on their journeys will be 'rational'. The rational concerns and needs of passengers relate to whether they will still be able to make their current journeys. However there will also be an 'emotional' impact of the Thameslink Programme on passengers. In particular there is some concern amongst passengers that the rail industry may fail to consider the important personal consequences of journey disruption, including enhanced feelings of stress, anxiety and the impact on family and work situations.

Passengers' concerns about possible increases in fares and the quality of TOC communications are also addressed in this section.

3.4.2 Passenger concerns and needs - Rational

In order to give some idea of how passengers prioritise their rational concerns, we have described below the highest, mid level and lowest concerns.

Highest concerns

Of most pressing concern to passengers is the impact of the disruption on their rail journeys, in particular any timetable changes, longer journeys or the knock-on impact of more passengers travelling on other modes of transport (e.g. the Underground becoming more crowded at peak times). Also of key concern is the impact of the disruption at different stations (including local train stations) and the overall increases in congestion that may occur at stations as a result of the works.

"It sounds great if it all goes according to plan but it makes me think of traffic jams. You only need one signal failure and the whole system is down"

[After 9pm South]

Medium concerns

Of less immediate concern, but nonetheless important for passengers are fears that communication between First Capital Connect/Southeastern and the other transport networks operating in and out of London will be disjointed and a

coordinated approach will not be employed. The key concern here is that there could be engineering works happening on both the central core and the alternative Underground routes at the same time. Tube overcrowding is also an issue for people who do not view the Underground as their preferred mode of transport but who will be forced to use it more during the period of disruption. Overrunning works are often raised as an area of concern. Whilst there is some concern that alternatives provided (such as replacement bus services) may be unreliable, there is equal concern expressed by some passengers that the rail industry may not provide any information on alternative routes etc. Thus, at the very least, passengers expect to see/hear clear and accessible information on what other modes are available – see later sections of this document for more detailed information on communications requirements.

“They definitely need to make sure London Underground are not doing drastic works at the same time or there will be chaos.”
[Moorgate/Barbican]

“The Piccadilly Line stops at 10:30pm just now, so there definitely needs to be some coordination with LU over these engineering works.”
[Blackfriars Off-Peak]

Low concerns

Some passengers raised concerns about the terms and conditions on rail tickets issued by different TOCs and worried that there would be complexity and confusion during the works. The principle concern being whether their ticket will be valid on the alternatives. A minority of leisure users claimed that the overall impact of the Thameslink Programme may encourage them to cut back on unnecessary journeys.

“How would it work if you have a season ticket for the train only? It would have to be accepted on other methods of transport”
[Blackfriars Off-Peak]

“I probably won’t be making trips to Brighton at the weekend any more if this is the case.”
[Blackfriars Off-Peak]

3.4.3 Passenger concerns and needs - Emotional

High concerns

Of highest 'emotional' concern to passengers is experiencing disruption to their journey and poor punctuality, both of which make for a more stressful journey experience and can result in passengers being late for work or missing personal appointments.

Medium concerns

The personal stress and anxiety that comes with the disruption to routines (e.g. having to leave home earlier or get home later) is of less immediate concern to passengers but is nonetheless still important due to the wider impact it has on their lives.

Low concerns

The effect the disruption will have on family life, work life and generally the impact on others is also of some concern. The fear here is that there may be longer term and more indirect implications that do not manifest themselves immediately (e.g. marriage breakdowns, loss of jobs etc).

Passengers emotional needs can be best summarised as follows:

- Over-deliver on current hygiene factors
- Confidence in railway
- Stick to promises made
- Safety reassurances (infrastructure)
- (Additional) human presence
- Clarity about the temporary timetable

3.4.4 Cost concerns and needs

While cost is often at the forefront of passenger minds and the issue they are inclined to shout loudest about during this research it tended to be lower priority than other issues such as communications.

Nonetheless, there is concern that fares will increase to help cover the vast cost of the Thameslink Programme. Passengers feel quite strongly that the annual fare increases should be frozen during the period of disruption and there were some calls for compensation to make up for the inconvenience experienced.

“This will need to be paid for somehow but I certainly hope that the fares on this route won’t be subject to the usual annual increase in January. If anything we should get a discount to compensate us for the inconvenience but at the very least prices should be frozen until the work has finished.”

[After 9pm South]

Some also pointed out that extra expense will be incurred by having to incorporate more modes of transport into their journeys, thus they would welcome tickets being valid on alternative modes during the period of works – as well as complete clarity that that is the case.

A small minority of respondents mentioned a concern that TOCs may want passengers to continue using their services during the works, and may not therefore be as upfront about alternative routes as they could be. Thus, it would seem that providing comprehensive and clear information on alternative routes would help to challenge some of the more negative perceptions of TOCs.

3.4.5 Communications concerns and needs

From a passenger perspective, communications and information are at the core of requirements for the Thameslink Programme to be rolled out and executed effectively.

Many of the passenger concerns regarding communications stem from previous poor experiences across the rail industry. Respondents cited examples of being ‘kept in the dark’ when experiencing problems and some felt that there is often a tendency to feed passengers inaccurate information. Previous examples of this inaccurate information cited tended to focus on when timescales for construction works were not met. Other concerns focused on complex text-based poster information, TOCs making last minute changes to timetables and staff not being sufficiently informed to be able to help passengers.

Needs

Passengers highlighted the following as their key communications needs leading up to and throughout the period of disruption.

- Up to date information
- Quality information
- Integrated information
- Advance warning
- Ad hoc warning
- Passenger consultation / dialogue
- Appropriate tone of communications

- Stick to promises made
- Progress updates
- Keep passengers in the loop
- Tell us what they are doing
- Safety reassurances
- Additional human presence
- Provision of temporary timetable booklets

3.4.6 Needs hierarchy

In order to create a summary and prioritisation of passenger needs, we felt it would be beneficial to organise them into a Needs Hierarchy with three key levels of needs as follows:

High quality communication from the TOCs will be essential to allay negative feelings among passengers and maintain overall confidence in the rail system as the Thameslink Programme is rolled out. Providing a fairly high level of service continuity during the period of works and ensuring that there is as little disruption as reasonably possible are seen as essential factors by all passengers. However, whilst failure to meet these needs will result in considerable passenger frustration and anger, ensuring their provision is unlikely to have any overall positive impact on passenger perceptions. This is essentially because these factors are seen as minimum expectations.

In order to begin to make a difference, passengers need to feel that they are being offered a choice of alternative routes and modes (for example, even though there was not great enthusiasm for a replacement bus service, it may be necessary to be seen to be providing one, at least initially). Passengers feel it is important that the works are conducted with as much forward thinking and planning as possible. Thus, co-ordinating the works with other modes such as the Underground and conducting them using a phased approach will at the very least make passengers feel that the TOCs are trying to minimise the effect on them.

3.5 Communications Strategy

In April 2008, First Capital Connect commissioned research into how best to inform passengers about the Thameslink Programme at both a more general and a journey specific level.

This research looked at passengers previous experience of train travel disruptions and how best to build on those experiences. Our analysis is that there are multiple benefits to be derived from communicating news and information about the Thameslink Programme in stages.

The required communication approach can be broken down into five stages that can be summarised as follows:

Pre-Stage

- Will involve more visible communications about the Moorgate branch closure.

Stage One

- Introduce positive messages about the Thameslink Programme.

Stage Two

- Introduce an overview of the likely disruption.

Stage Three

- Offer details about works and alternative arrangements.

Stage Four

- Offer ongoing and adhoc updates.

We have outlined in the sections below our suggestions regarding what each of these stages needs to entail.

3.5.1 Pre - Stage Communication

Moorgate Branch Closure

As outlined earlier in this document, amongst the Moorgate focus group participants, there was very little knowledge about the branch closure. This resulted in passengers feeling cut out of the loop and seemed to heighten ill feeling when they found out. The formal statutory closure notices currently on display (e.g. at Farringdon) have clearly had insufficient impact and 'cut through'. It will be important to learn from this for future stages of communications.

“The poster does not have to spell out every detail. It just needs to get across the big messages or to say ‘call this number’.”
[Moorgate/Barbican]

An effective campaign would communicate the following key information:

- Details of the Thameslink Programme
- Reasons for Moorgate branch closure
- Date of closure
- Likely disruption & alternatives available

3.5.2 Stage One Communication

Key to stage one of the communications process will be exploiting the potential feel good factor around the benefits of the Thameslink Programme. It is essential not to mention the disruption the works will create at this point, but to focus instead on the positives. Given the fast approaching start date of the Thameslink Programme works, it will be important to implement stage one as soon as possible so as to give passengers sufficient time to assimilate the news.

“There should definitely be some information out there with positive messages like what we are going to get from all this work. Like those posters they had going up the tube escalators telling us about why it takes so long to change an escalator.”
[After 9pm North]

Aim

Despite the fact that the majority of our sample were completely unaware of the Thameslink Programme when it was introduced to give an overview at the start of the sessions, they recognise many potential benefits for them in the longer term. We would therefore suggest that it is worth communicating these benefits to engender positive PR prior to communicating the less positive news concerning the disruption.

Media Mix

This information needs to be communicated across a number of different media. First, it must be communicated across the whole Thameslink network, including at stations and onboard trains. Second, local media need to be employed to help spread the word, and third we would suggest passengers could be directed to a website dedicated to the Thameslink Programme to find out more detail about the benefits (as suggested in the previous research findings).

“There should be a specific website for these works that we can go to in order to register our email address and sign up for further updates.”
[Blackfriars Off-Peak]

The key messages to communicate in stage one of the communications campaign will be as follows:

- High investment
- Longer and brand new trains
- More frequent service
- Improved stations – capacity and environment
- Less standing

3.5.3 Stage Two Communication

This stage of the communications needs to focus specifically on passengers who travel on affected routes through on-train and on-station channels.

Aim

The aim of this stage is to alert rail users that there needs to be fairly extensive upgrading of train stations and the accompanying infrastructure and to engage them in the process of the consultation and communication programme.

“There needs to be information about these works from about 6 months in advance and then on a regular basis, notices on trains and in stations.”
[Blackfriars Commuter]

*“They need to give us the right information and not fob us off with any bull****.”*
[Blackfriars Commuter]

“We need plenty of notice and need to know when it starts, an estimate of how long it will be for and details of any replacement services, how frequent they are.”
[After 9pm North]

Media Mix

Stage two needs to be communicated across the whole Thameslink network, including at stations, on trains and through staff and again needs to divert passengers to a dedicated website where they can find out about stage three.

The key messages to communicate in stage two of the communications campaign will be as follows:

- Moorgate Branch closure
- Closure of interchange with London Underground at Blackfriars
- Central core upgrade
- Reassurance that works will be undertaken as quickly as possible with minimum disruption to journeys
- Watch this space for more information

3.5.4 Stage Three Communication

At this stage, there is a need to present comprehensive information to passengers about the alternatives available. It is important not to assume that the majority will take steps to find out for themselves. This information must always be easily accessible and highly visible / audible.

Aim

The aim of stage three of the communications campaign should be to provide a comprehensive picture of the construction works and how passenger journeys will be affected. Also, additional information on alternative travel options and being seen to cooperate with other modes of transport will go further to meet passenger needs. It became very apparent throughout this research that cross-modal co-operation is expected by passengers and will help to increase levels of confidence in the rail network during this period of disruption.

Media Mix

It is important to focus on the affected routes and affected journeys by providing information at stations, on trains and through staff. Again, passengers can also be diverted to a dedicated website to find out more and equip themselves with information to print out.

Providing passengers with the opportunity to interact with the TOC and sign up for ongoing update services through SMS and/or email will also ensure that they are being kept in the loop over the course of the Thameslink Programme.

The key messages to communicate in stage three of the communications campaign will be as follows:

- Dates of works
- Revised timetables
- Affected services
- How to get more information

- Impact on cost of tickets
- Alternatives available
- Works being conducted on other modes/TOC routes

3.5.5 Stage Four Communication

There is a need here to challenge existing perceptions of the rail industry that ongoing and ad hoc information delivery is inadequate. Passengers cite examples here of poor tannoy announcements, text-heavy posters and sometimes a complete lack of information about trains not arriving on time etc.

“There needs to be tannoys that work on the platform and on the train. When the train has stopped we need more explanation as to why it is stationary.”

[Moorgate/Barbican]

Aim

The aims of stage four are multiple:

- To keep rail users updated on the progress of the Thameslink Programme.
- To inform passengers that TOCs are keeping their promises and meeting targets.
- To warn passengers that they will be kept in the loop if work slips behind or unforeseen changes have to be made.
- To let people know what work is still to be undertaken will help people in their planning of journeys.

Media Mix

A personalised and tailored approach for individual routes and stations (via SMS and email) will keep passengers in the loop when they are on the move e.g. travelling to the station. In addition, flexible and targeted media (announcements on trains, at stations and on departure boards) will also help to keep passengers informed.

The key messages to communicate in stage four of the communications campaign will be as follows:

- We are on target
- This is what has been achieved so far
- This is what still needs to be achieved
- Apologies for unexpected delays/overruns & reasons

3.5.6 Tone of communications

We know from previous research for London Underground on engineering works communications that the tone of communication during periods of widespread disruption is as important as the content.

Failure to gauge the mood of passengers and using inappropriate tone can result in very negative PR for the TOCs and the rail industry as a whole.

Having an up front focus on the benefits will undoubtedly set a positive tone for the communications campaign. However, when communicating the disruption in stages two and three, the tone will need to be matter of fact and unapologetic. At this stage, efficiency needs to be communicated and it is essential not to link this part of the communications to the benefits of the Thameslink Programme as this may serve to antagonise passengers – for example, telling a commuter that their journey to work on this route is no longer possible, but they can expect longer trains in 3 years time is unlikely to be met with enthusiasm and optimism.

Finally, stage four may need to be apologetic and contrite – depending upon the extent of the ad hoc disruptions that occur. It is important however, not to overplay this apologetic and contrite tone, but to offer a sense of optimism and instil a sense of confidence in passengers and offer revised solutions if necessary.

4. Conclusions & Recommendations

In spite of passengers' initial shock on learning about the scale of disruption they may face once the Thameslink Programme gets underway, the research has highlighted a number of factors that will lessen the potential impact on those using the affected routes. The primary factor in this instance is the variety of alternative routes that exist through and around the centre of the capital. The strength of resistance to the Thameslink Programme amongst the different groups of passengers correlates with the number and convenience of alternative travel options at their disposal. The second factor is that, with the clear exception of users of the Moorgate branch and passengers who interchange with LUL at Blackfriars, daily commuters and weekday off-peak passengers will face relatively little inconvenience.

The extent of the disruption caused will vary considerably by user group. Those who expect to be most seriously affected are the most reliant on the existing rail network for work-related and essential journeys, particularly commuters who travel through to Blackfriars or Moorgate.

The research has identified a range of concerns and needs that arise amongst passengers at various levels. First, there are 'rational' concerns that relate to the extent to which journeys will be affected by the disruption. Second, there are 'emotional' concerns and these relate more to the extent to which passengers will feel affected in their personal, family and work lives. Third, concerns have arisen about the cost of the Thameslink Programme and the potential impact on fares. Although cost is often top of mind for rail passengers, in reality it has emerged in this research as being secondary to many of the other issues. Finally, it has transpired that good communication is at the heart of passenger requirements.

Communications will play an essential role in minimising the extent of passenger disruption and inconvenience and maintaining consumer confidence in using the rail system in future. There is a clear need to develop a cohesive communications strategy, the details of which have been outlined in this report. The text-heavy statutory closure notices on display at station (e.g. Farringdon) are a good example of how not to do it.

However the research has unveiled a potential conflict of interest between passenger and TOC priorities regarding the Thameslink Programme. From a TOC perspective there is a need to maintain revenue and ensure that passengers continue to use current routes wherever possible. However, the passenger priority is quite simply and understandably to get from A to B as quickly as possible using

whatever services are available and with minimal disruption. It is not therefore realistic to expect passengers to put themselves out to use a specific TOC or route.

This might imply that there is no financial benefit to First Capital Connect and Southeastern in investing in a communications programme during the period of disruption. Particularly as there is minimal evidence to indicate that passengers would stop using the rail system altogether in the long term.

Importantly, however, passengers think that the TOCs have a moral obligation and responsibility to keep them informed about how services are affected during the period of disruption. Also, the TOCs should not ignore the reputational damage that could occur if passengers were to perceive that alternatives were being deliberately hidden.

In summary, it would seem unrealistic to expect passengers to keep using the affected routes as usual through the period of disruption. This research indicates that it will be more important for the rail industry to focus on delivering against an identified hierarchy of needs, as follows:

- **Ensure throughout the period of works that disruption is kept to a minimum.**
- **Be seen to be providing alternative modes of transport, at least initially (although the reality may be that these are not heavily used).**
- **Be seen to be coordinating with London Underground and other TOCs over planned works.**
- **Continue to communicate the importance of a phased approach.**
- **Develop a communications strategy to, first, exploit the good news behind the investment, then to inform in more detail about the exact nature of the disruption in a targeted manner.**

5. Appendix

5.1 Discussion Guide

Context

- Moderator to explain that research is being conducted on behalf of Passenger Focus, First Capital Connect and Southeastern who wish to understand passengers' views about the proposed changes to the Thameslink routes
- Moderator to explain that feedback will help inform decisions taken but that any views expressed will not necessarily be implemented

Introduction

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

Background

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

Journey Details

- (To provide context for future discussion)
- Explore rail journeys made by user group / segment
 - Local station used most often
 - Destination station(s) travelled to
 - Details of changes & connections

- Any interchange with other modes of transport
- Days & times of journeys typically made
- Discuss type of ticket most often used for journeys made
 - Daily or period tickets
 - Any railcard holding / usage

Thameslink Programme (spontaneous)

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

Thameslink Programme (prompted)

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

Moderator to introduce the Thameslink Programme to the group

- The Thameslink Programme is a £3.5 billion investment by the government to provide more capacity to meet existing and future passenger demand.
- 12 coach trains will replace four and eight coach trains between Bedford and Brighton and on other Thameslink routes.
- Up to 24 trains per hour will be able to run through London at peak times.
- Rebuilding work will be carried out in phases at stations including London Bridge, Farringdon and Blackfriars.
- Brand new trains will start running in 2012, with the full fleet in service from December 2015.

Discussion of spontaneous passenger issues and priorities:

- Initial response to news of programme
- What are the positive outtakes from a passenger perspective?
- Do passengers accept the need to improve/upgrade the infrastructure?
- Do passengers recognise the future advantages for them?
- Highlight key reservations or concerns at this stage
- What is expected in terms of rebuilding / engineering work that will be required
- Assessment on likely impact on journeys currently made
- What additional information is required at this stage
- How do passengers want to access this information
- How do passengers find out about engineering disruption now in terms of different media used. What works & what doesn't.
- What sources would be used to get more details

Moderator to introduce details of construction work to the group.

From March 2009 a number of timetable changes will take place to facilitate the construction work, including:

- *Permanent closure of Farringdon to Moorgate route. The formal “statutory closure” procedure involving public consultation is complete and has been endorsed by Government.*
- *Closure of the London Underground station (District & Circle) at Blackfriars from March 2009 for approximately 3 years.*
- *Closure of the ‘central core’ of the route (the section between St. Pancras International and London Bridge/Elephant and Castle) between 10.30 pm -4.00am every night from December 2008 for 2 years.*
- *Significant additional planned engineering work on top of the overnight closures of the ‘central core’, e.g. there will be no services through the ‘central core’ on 33 of 52 weekends in year one of the works.*
- *Punctuality is forecast to deteriorate.*

General reactions to this news to include:

- Response to scale of the work planned
- Response to scheduled timeframe for the engineering works
- How will this affect journeys currently made
- What will they do during the disruption?
- What alternative transport arrangements will they use?
- How would they like to be kept up-to-date with progress on the work?
- What are the key information requirements?
- Out of all the issues raised, which are the key concerns/priorities for the different passenger categories – is there a preferred solution?

Specific reactions to details of proposed construction work to include:

- What are the really key bits of information passengers need as they face this disruption
- How would passengers expect / want to access the information they require
- We know that lots of people tune out visual or audio information. How does the industry break through that barrier?
- Extent to which passengers know who to contact if they need to get in touch with “the railway” to check what’s happening to their trains.
- How familiar are people with the sources of info that exist currently? (This has implications for how passengers will find out about the alternatives.)
- What needs to be done to allay passenger concerns and to reassure them
- What will make passengers confident enough to continue using the railway (this is a key question)

- Should a bus be provided between St. Pancras and London Bridge? Would respondents rather use this or the Northern Line (or take the car instead)
- Is there any interest from passengers in having through trains between Kent and St. Albans/Luton.

Depth Interviews Only:

- Do passengers know that they can book assistance and how to do it (and not just for wheelchairs, other disabilities too)
- Have they actually used this service in the past & if not why not.
- What are the barriers to using this service and how could they be overcome
- How do passengers currently get information about travel? Any use of charities, care agencies etc. (e.g. Sense, or Parkinson's Society). What are the implications for future information requirements
- How do passengers envisage that they will transfer between St. Pancras & London Bridge

Passenger Concerns

Brainstorm for range of concerns that passenger groups have about the way that their journeys will be affected and record these on a flipchart

- How do these vary by user group
- What are the most / least important concerns
- Which are the things that passengers could work around
- Which things would be a fundamental problem
- Which things would need to be addressed by the TOCs and rail industry
- What practical help is expected / required from TOCs and the industry
- Where are gaps most likely to occur between what is needed and what will be provided

Group specific issues:

Group 1

The obvious questions will be:

- Why? The closure of the line between Farringdon and Moorgate is required to allow 12 car platforms to be constructed at Farringdon – the site is so constrained that it is physically impossible to retain the junction with the route to Barbican and Moorgate and extend the Farringdon platforms as required.
- Can they do this? Closure of this route has been subject to formal closure hearings as required by law and closure has been authorised by Government.
- What happens to the trains? They will continue to run to Farringdon, as now, but will then take a different route via City Thameslink, Blackfriars and terminate in Kent, probably at Sevenoaks.

- Will my ticket be valid on the Underground? Anybody with a season ticket that is currently valid to Moorgate on an First Capital Connect train will be able to use the Underground instead to Barbican or Moorgate at no extra charge for 2 years after closure.

The areas to probe on Group 1 are:

- What do you think you will do?
 - Change onto the Underground and still travel to Barbican or Moorgate on the Circle/H&C/Met?
 - Get off at Farringdon and walk
 - Stay on to City Thameslink and walk from there
 - Stay on to Blackfriars and walk from there
 - Do something else
- What will you need to help you decide what's best for you?
- How does the rail industry make sure that everyone knows about Barbican and Moorgate closing before it happens?
- How far in advance should the communications start

NB: Despite the pedestrian flow modelling, it is not impossible (particularly in the first week or so after the Moorgate branch shuts) that that Farringdon has to be closed temporarily while crowds disperse. How do passengers want to be informed about this (and what they can do instead) before they get to the station

Group 2.

This group will have its daily routine temporarily altered in that from roughly January 2009 for approximately 3 years the London Underground station at Blackfriars will be closed. LUL Circle/District trains will run non-stop between Mansion House and Temple.

- Why? To allow for the complete rebuilding of Blackfriars station, including the access to LUL platforms. It is impossible to do the reconstruction work while maintaining access to the LUL platforms

Key things to probe:

- What do you think you will do?
 - stop using Blackfriars altogether? – if so, (from the south) will you:
 - catch a different train into another London station instead? (e.g. Charring Cross, Victoria)
 - find somewhere else to change to the Underground (Elephant, London Bridge, Farringdon, St Pancras?)
 - walk from another station (i.e. not bother with the Underground at all)

- continue to use Blackfriars? – if so, will you:
 - walk all the way from there (i.e. not bother with the Underground)
 - walk to Temple or Mansion House and catch a District/Circle train from there?
- What will you need to help you decide what's best for you? Street plans, walking routes, (scheduled) bus links
- Do you know about the walking options available? How would you want to find out about them? Are you likely to use any of these?
- How should the rail industry make sure that everyone knows about Blackfriars Underground station closing before it happens?
- How far in advance should the communications start

Group 3.

(As for Group 2)

This group will have its daily routine temporarily altered in that from roughly January 2009 for approximately 3 years the London Underground station at Blackfriars will be closed. LUL Circle/District trains will run non-stop between Mansion House and Temple.

- Why? To allow for the complete rebuilding of Blackfriars station, including the access to LUL platforms. It is impossible to do the reconstruction work while maintaining access to the LUL platforms

Key things to probe:

- What do you think you will do?
 - stop using Blackfriars altogether? – if so, (from the south) will you:
 - catch a different train into another London station instead? (e.g. Charring Cross, Victoria)
 - find somewhere else to change to the Underground (Elephant, London Bridge, Farringdon, St Pancras?)
 - walk from another station (i.e. not bother with the Underground at all)
 - continue to use Blackfriars? – if so, will you:
 - walk all the way from there (i.e. not bother with the Underground)
 - walk to Temple or Mansion House and catch a District/Circle train from there?
 - **stop using the railway entirely because there will be no interchange with LUL at Blackfriars?**
- What will you need to help you decide what's best for you? Street plans, walking routes, (scheduled) bus links
- Do you know about the walking options available? How would you want to find out about them? Are you likely to use any of these?

- How should the rail industry make sure that everyone knows about Blackfriars Underground station closing before it happens?
- How far in advance should the communications start

Group 4.

The key context to provide here is that from around Christmas this year for 30 months the 'central core' will be closed between St. Pancras and London Bridge overnight from 2230 until 0430 – although with the possibility of later or earlier starts from time to time.

The key things to probe here are:

- Whether the fact that trains will be starting at St. Pancras will be an issue (i.e. they will not be able to get on at London Bridge, Blackfriars, City Thameslink and Farringdon)
- How they want to be communicated with when the overnight closures start
- How they want to be communicated with if the block is going to start earlier than 2230
- Would they use a replacement bus service from London Bridge to St. Pancras via Blackfriars, City Thameslink, Farringdon?
- If so, fully accessible low floor buses or coaches? Frequency required?
- What they would do if, on occasions, trains have to start at Kentish Town

Group 5.

The key things to probe here are:

- Whether the fact that trains will be starting at London Bridge or Elephant & Castle will be an issue (i.e. they will not be able to get on at St. Pancras, Blackfriars, City Thameslink and Farringdon)
- How they want to be communicated with when the overnight closures start
- How they want to be communicated with if the block is going to start earlier than 2230
- Would they use a bus from St. Pancras to London Bridge via Farringdon, City Thameslink, Blackfriars
- If so, fully accessible low floor buses or coaches? Frequency required?

NB: Important to understand differences between Groups 5 and 6 in terms of weekday vs. weekend issues.

Group 6.

In this group the key things to probe are:

- Whether the fact that trains will be starting at St. Pancras, London Bridge or Elephant (or perhaps starting from another London station, e.g. Victoria) will be an issue
- How they want to be communicated with when the weekend closures start
- How they want to be communicated with on an ongoing basis
- Would they use a bus from London Bridge or Elephant to St. Pancras and vice versa via Blackfriars, City Thameslink, Farringdon?
- If so, fully accessible low floor buses or coaches? Frequency required?

NB: Important to understand differences between Groups 5 and 6 in terms of weekday vs. weekend issues.

Group 7.

NB: These passengers may be less familiar with engineering works resulting in the central core being closed from time to time than many of the other groups so may need to do a bit more explanation. This group of passengers will be primarily affected by the overnight and weekend closures if they are travelling from south of London to get to Luton and north of London to get to Gatwick. However, passengers starting their journey in London and used to having a choice of stations (St. Pancras, Farringdon, City Thameslink, Blackfriars, London Bridge etc.) will need to know what is going on

In terms of things to probe:

- If your journey to or from the airport is going to involve a bus across central London at weekends or after 2230 will you still travel by train?
- If so, fully accessible low floor buses or coaches? Frequency required?
- What will you need to make sure that this all works smoothly for you? Luggage assistance etc.
- How will you want to be informed about engineering works in the central core?
- If First Capital Connect northbound trains from Gatwick are terminating at London Bridge, are you likely to opt for Victoria instead?
- Dealing with passengers who expected to have a train straight through, but because their flight was late landing etc. got the wrong side of the 2230 cut off.

Group 8.

In terms of things to probe:

- If your journey is going to involve a bus across central London at weekends will you still travel by train?

- Will you use the bus, or will you get from St. Pancras to London Bridge (or another London station) under your own steam?
- If so, fully accessible low floor buses or coaches?
- Would you make the north and south elements of the journey with First Capital Connect, or if you can't have a train through the middle of London will you go to Victoria or London Bridge and get on the first train you see?
- What will you need to make sure that this all works smoothly for you? Luggage assistance etc.
- How early indications are that most passengers will rely on communications to avoid the affected routes altogether in order to minimise the inconvenience to planned journeys
- Will you want to be informed about engineering works in the central core?

Group 9

Things to probe (assuming that trains run from the north as far as St. Pancras, and from the south as far as London Bridge):

- What problems will it create for you if trains cannot run through the central core overnight?
- If your journey is going to involve a bus across central London at weekends will you still travel by train? If not, what else will you do?
- If so, fully accessible low floor buses or coaches?
If you still travel, what will you need to make sure it all works
- How will you want to be informed about exactly when the overnight closures will start and what the timetable changes are
- Issues if trains had to start / finish at Kentish Town on occasions

Passenger Needs

Use prioritisation of concerns from flipchart exercise in previous section to help respondents focus on key needs during construction work

- What are most urgent needs during period of disruption
- How are these needs articulated by respondents
- Which needs will require assistance from the rail industry
- What assistance would be provided in an ideal world
- What assistance do they realistically expect to be provided
- What are the minimum requirements in this respect
- What would exceed expectations

Practical Steps

Understanding of what passengers expect to be done in advance to minimise the negative impact of the construction work on passenger journeys.

- What would passengers expect TOCs and the industry to do
- To what extent do these suggestions allay concerns
- What are hygiene factors
- What would exceed expectations
- How do passengers expect to manage during construction work if each of the suggestions are implemented

Information Requirements

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

Summary

- Summarise key output from session
- Overview of reactions to proposed engineering works
- What are key issues
- What are key learnings
- Likely extent of disruption to travel plans
- What are key concerns
- How to help allay these concerns
- What are passenger priorities by user group
- What do passengers expect the rail industry to do to help
- What practical steps will be most welcomed / useful
- Key information requirements
- Key messages for Passenger Focus and stakeholders
- How to best provide reassurance to passengers
- How to maintain satisfaction during the construction period

