

# Reading Station engineering works

## What passengers want

Independent national passenger watchdog

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Passengerfocus  
putting passengers first

Passenger numbers at Reading Station are forecast to double by 2030. Therefore over the next six years, Network Rail is working to increase capacity at the station.

The first stage of these works included the re-signalling of 100 miles of railway around Reading and transferring control to a new signal centre in Didcot. In order to undertake this first stage of works, there was a closure of Reading station between the 24 and 30 December 2010. This had a significant impact on passenger journeys to/from and via Reading. Long distance passengers travelled on diverted trains or changed trains to avoid Reading, while shorter distance passengers used replacement bus services to get to/from their destination. As the Passenger Focus' National

Passenger Survey has shown, how delays to journeys are handled is very important to passenger satisfaction.

Ahead of these works, there were extensive communications to passengers to inform them of how their journeys would be affected. Passenger Focus commissioned research to assess the impact of these communications, and to understand passengers' experiences and expectations during the planned engineering works. The research also identified areas of good practice and ascertained improvements for future works at Reading station and other similar works in the future.



## Methodology

Passengers whose journeys were affected by the works were asked to complete an eight page questionnaire. Questionnaires were handed out at various stations to passengers using the replacement bus services, and on-board diverted trains and 1,811 surveys were returned.

### Passengers who used diverted trains:

- 98% of passengers who were travelling on diverted trains do not undertake this journey regularly (i.e. travelling every few months or less), most of them were leisure passengers making a trip to see families and friends over Christmas/New Year.
- passengers who said that they knew how long their journey normally took said that they had an average of 75 minutes added to their normal journey times.

# 98%

diverted train passengers did not regularly undertake the journey

### Passengers who used the bus replacement services:

- 79% were travelling for leisure purposes and a fifth (21%) were commuting.
- most passengers used the replacement bus for part of their journey (77%), rather than all of it.
- just under two thirds (64%) of passengers were not regular travellers (i.e. travelled less than a few times a month) on the route where they were given the questionnaire while over a third of passengers (36%) travelled on it regularly (i.e. travelled at least a few times a month).
- passengers who said they knew how long their journey normally took said that they had an average of 45 minutes added to their normal journey times.

# Key findings

## Awareness of the engineering works taking place at Reading:

- three quarters of passengers (76%) were aware of the engineering works before they arrived at the station. However, awareness depended on how often passengers used the route.
- passengers who used the route more often (at least once every few months) were more likely to know about the engineering works before they arrived at the station than those who used it less often.
- passengers on a replacement bus, who tended to travel on the route more frequently, had higher awareness of the engineering works (87%) than those travelling on the diverted trains (73%). Passengers on the replacement bus had higher awareness than those on the train. This is at least in part because they are more regular travellers than

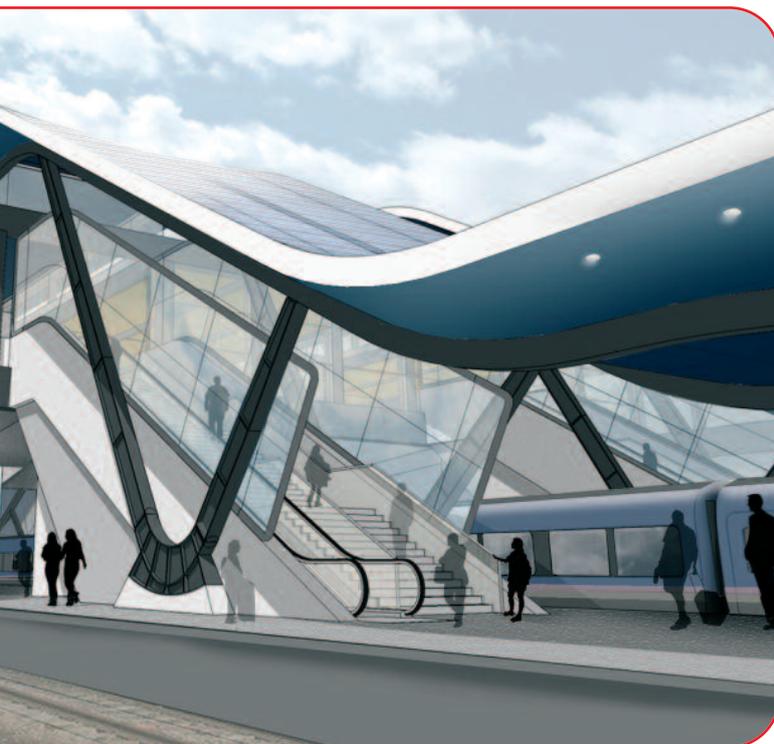
those travelling by train. A quarter of passengers travelling on replacement buses found out about the engineering works more than a month before travelling.

- a possible explanation for the varying level of awareness could be that when either making a journey enquiry or buying a ticket, it is likely

passengers were presented with different information depending on whether the journey involved a replacement bus or diverted train. If they travelled by replacement bus, it is likely that this was made more explicit than if there was an extended journey time as a result of a diverted train.

## Were passengers aware of the engineering works before they arrived at the station?

	Yes	No	Base
Every day to a few days a week	88	12	114
A few times a fortnight to a few times a month	84	16	209
Every few months	79	21	680
Once or twice a year	75	25	423
Less than once a year	73	27	116
This is my first journey	57	43	225



The top three methods passengers used to find out about the engineering works in advance of travel, and how they would like to be informed in future...

### The travellers who used the route regularly were more likely to use and prefer:

- posters/notices around the station (use 53% / prefer 65%)
- timetables on the internet (use 43% / prefer 42%)
- announcements made at the station (use 37% / prefer 36%).

### Passengers who used the route less regularly:

- most likely to prefer and have used the internet to have found out about the engineering works (Use 45% / prefer 52%).
  - their other preferences are different to how they actually found out.
  - these travellers would like to find out about engineering works from more proactive communications from the train company i.e. emails from the train company (36%) and posters at the train station (35%). Instead they found out from notices on the train website (28%), or through a friend, relative or colleague (20%). However, emails may not be practical for many infrequent travellers.



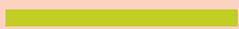
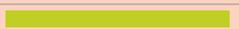
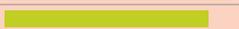
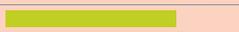
# Rail replacement buses

Passengers who travelled on the replacement bus services were asked to rate their satisfaction with various aspects of the service. Most highly rated were directions given, and the time allowed for the transfer. Lower ratings were given to frequency of the bus and help provided with luggage.

## Satisfaction with aspects of the bus replacement service

(% very/fairly satisfied)

Base 238

<b>Directions given to/from replacement bus service</b>		85
<b>Time allowed for the transfer between bus/train</b>		82
<b>Frequency of the bus service</b>		75
<b>Help provided with luggage</b>		63

### Overall satisfaction with handling of engineering works:

Nearly two thirds (63%) of passengers were very or fairly satisfied with how the engineering works were handled. In particular 81% of passengers who travelled on the replacement buses rated themselves as fairly or very satisfied with the handling of the works. The relatively high satisfaction of passengers on the replacement bus reinforces the importance of good prior communications – as this was the group of passengers most likely to know about the engineering works in advance.

### Priorities for improvement:

We asked passengers what type of railway they wanted to see once the engineering works were completed, and also what they expect to see in reality. The table below outlines this. The top two improvements passengers would like to see are a more reliable/punctual train service and reduced journey times. However fewer passengers expect a direct train service or less crowded trains even though they are high priorities.

# 41%

passengers said they did not know what improvements they expected to see as a result of the engineering works



## Passengers priorities for improvement

As a result of engineering, the top 5 improvements that:

Passengers <b>WOULD LIKE</b> to see:	Improvement <b>EXPECTED</b>
<b>1 More reliable/punctual train service</b>	<b>32%</b>
<b>2 Reduced journey times</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>3 A direct train service</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>4 Less crowded trains</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>5 More frequent service on the route</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>No benefits</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Don't know</b>	<b>41%</b>

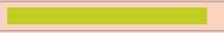
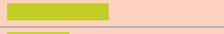
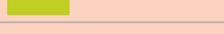
41% of passengers said they do not know what improvements they expect to see as a result of the engineering works. These were mainly infrequent travellers who were not aware of engineering works in advance, and therefore had missed out on much of the communications around why the engineering works were happening. Therefore it is also important to also communicate the reason on the day.

### Likelihood of travelling by rail during future engineering works:

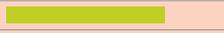
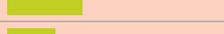
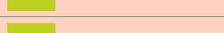
Passengers were asked whether they would be likely to travel by rail in future under a series of different circumstances. The results show that there remains a preference for staying on a train, rather than using a replacement bus, and most would choose not to travel if buses were replacing trains for part or all of the route.

### Likelihood of travelling by rail during future engineering

(% very/fairly likely to travel by rail)

	All passengers	Base 1,660
<b>Trains running on a diverted route</b>		69
<b>Needing to change trains on a route that is usually direct</b>		61
<b>Buses replacing trains for sections of the route</b>		31
<b>Buses replacing trains for the whole of the route</b>		19

### Preferred options for future engineering works at Reading station

	All passengers	Base 1,695
<b>No trains running after 9pm until next morning (Monday-Sunday) over a number of weeks</b>		33
<b>Weekend line diversions or amended timetables</b>		23
<b>Run a reduced service (Monday-Sunday) over a number of weeks</b>		19
<b>Full line closure for one week or a longer period (no trains during that period)</b>		11
<b>Christmas, Easter or August Bank Holiday line closures</b>		7
<b>Weekend line closures (no trains running on Saturday/Sunday over a number of weeks)</b>		7



### Next steps

Passenger Focus will take the issues raised in this research back to the rail industry in order to improve passenger experiences during engineering works, in particular the importance of communication in managing passengers' expectations. The industry will need to look at how to get information to passengers who do not regularly travel on the route affected by engineering works.

When asked about their preferred options for travel during future engineering works at Reading, passengers stated a preference for trains continuing to run but with alterations for a longer period of time compared to full line closures for a shorter amount of time. However it should be noted that these are mainly leisure passengers who may have different priorities and usages compared to business and commuting passengers. i.e. commuters have a much higher preference for weekend line closures than leisure passengers (20% vs. 6%), and a lower preference for no trains running after 9pm until next morning – Monday to Sunday (22% vs. 34%).

These results shine a positive light on the rail industry, the majority of passengers travelling during the engineering works knew about the works in advance of their journey, and were satisfied with how the situation was handled. Lessons from the works at Reading should be used during future engineering works as passengers on railways face increasing numbers of engineering upgrades in the years to come.

#### Contact us

If you want to know more about the work we are doing on your behalf to ensure you get a better deal when you travel by rail, bus, coach or tram contact us:

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