



**GWR**

 northern










# Passenger experiences of planned engineering work

## Draft report

### June 2017

5th Floor, Holborn Gate,  
26 Southampton Buildings, London WC2A 1AH  
T + 44 (0) 20 7861 3080  
W [www.cie.uk.com](http://www.cie.uk.com)  
E [enquiries@cie.uk.com](mailto:enquiries@cie.uk.com)

# Contents

 Objectives and methodology	..... p3
 Key findings	..... p6
 Experiences of travel during planned works	..... p11
 When and for how long works should take place	..... p19
 Views of replacement bus and coach services	..... p26
 Impact on passenger attitudes	..... p31
 Awareness of Rail Upgrade Plan	..... p44
 How passengers want to be informed about works	..... P49
 Conclusions	..... P54

# Objectives of the research

The ultimate objective of this project is to refresh Transport Focus', GWR's and Northern's understanding of rail passengers' experiences and expectations of planned engineering work

It will also feed into discussions about whether or not to update quantitative research from 2012<sup>1</sup>

Specifically, the research is designed to:

- Understand rail passengers' general **views about and experiences of travelling** during planned engineering works
- Understand passengers' views of **when engineering works should take place and for how long** – including the pros and cons of a concentrated closure for a number of weeks (week-days and week-ends) versus continual weekend disruption over a sustained period
- Establish passengers' views about the **use of replacement bus/coach services** during engineering works – including trade-offs around a longer journey time if it means staying on a train
- Consider the **impact on passenger attitudes and travel behaviours** of ongoing/continued historic exposure to disruption from the many planned engineering works taking place on the network; is this impacting passengers' perceptions of the railway being 'open for business'?
- Explore **awareness of, and attitudes towards, Network Rail's Railway Upgrade Plan**
- Understand **how passengers want to be informed** about forthcoming works, when they want to be informed, and the style of communication used

<sup>1</sup> The 2012 research can be accessed at:

<http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research-publications/publications/rail-passengers-experiences-and-priorities-during-engineering-works/>

# Methodology

This report is based on qualitative research, from the following sources.



Twelve **focus group discussions**, carried out in Leeds, Manchester, Bristol, Newport, Oxford and Reading



An **online community**, completed by 22 participants from locations across the GWR network

Both the focus groups and the online community included a mix of commuters, leisure and business travellers



Focus group fieldwork with GWR customers took place between **21<sup>st</sup> March and 6<sup>th</sup> April 2017**. Focus group fieldwork with Northern customers took place on the **2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> May**. The online community with GWR customers took place between **24<sup>th</sup> March and 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2017**



# Key Findings



# Key Findings – in summary

Passengers have difficulty differentiating between planned and unplanned engineering. Many also tend to think in terms of routine maintenance rather than large scale infrastructure improvement work

As a result, passengers tend to favour overnight work as inconveniencing fewest people. There is little appetite for concentrated closures – nor understanding as to why these might be necessary. Nor is there any consensus as to when such closures should take place; on balance the school summer holidays are seen as ‘least bad’

Passengers are learning to *check before you travel* – especially at week-ends – but this is not universal and is less common amongst commuters. At the very latest, they expect to be told about disruption when planning a journey and booking a ticket – ideally sooner. There is agreement that all available channels should be used to increase the chance of passengers hearing about disruption

There is a dislike and distrust of rail replacement buses – although expectations can be higher if a replacement coach is provided. Where practicable, staying on a diverted train is preferable to a bus even if the journey takes longer

There is no clear evidence that extensive disruption reduces passengers propensity to travel by rail or their confidence in the railways

# Key Findings – in detail

There were a range of experiences of planned engineering works among those spoken to in this study. Specifically, passengers reported that their travel had been affected in a range of ways. These included **travelling on alternative transport as provided by GWR/Northern, travelling in alternative transport which they themselves have provided and stopping travelling altogether**

Passengers highlighted a range of ways in which they had been affected by planned works. This included **impacts on their wellbeing, their ability to work, loss of time, financial impacts and impact on their travel plans**. Impacts were in line with those noted when this research was previously conducted in 2012

There were **mixed views on whether planned works had been managed well**, which were heavily influenced by passengers' own experiences during the works. Those with minimal disruption and significant notice often spoke positively of how works had been managed. Those with more negative views mentioned factors such as having experienced negative interactions with staff, being unaware of works in advance of travel, and perceptions that services offered were the minimum that operators were required to provide

# Key Findings – in detail

Passengers commonly felt that **overnight was the ideal time to complete planned works**. There was a fear from some however that overrunning works would mean that morning commuting services were delayed. These findings were similar to those from 2012

There was generally **little appetite for concentrated closures**. The anticipated disruption to passengers' travel plans, and knock-on effects on traffic and business in particular were seen to be significant. Overnight work was preferred

**Perceptions towards rail replacement services were generally negative** in all locations. Passengers highlighted a number of negative experiences with these, including difficulties switching between replacement services and other transport, difficulties if travelling with luggage or children, limited space, longer journeys than the train and difficulty in predicting journey time. The perception of coach services was more positive in terms of comfort but still caused concerns in terms of journey time and inconvenience

Passengers highlighted a range of ways in which their habits had been affected by planned works. These included **changing modes of transport, changing times or days of travel and increased checking of journey details before travel**. In some cases these habit changes continued even after the conclusion of works



# Key Findings – in detail

It was felt that the management of planned works **did not have a strong effect on passengers' overall attitudes towards rail**. Participants felt that their attitudes were more strongly influenced by factors such as their day-to-day experience and their experience of unplanned delays. Passengers' **likelihood to travel has typically not changed**, though atypically there has been a cumulative effect of planned engineering on the attitudes of some. Changes have occurred in two main ways. For some this is **increased checking before travel**, to ensure that services are running. Others **avoid using rail at particular times** – most commonly on Sundays

**Awareness of the reasons for planned works that participants had experienced was mixed**. Some GWR passengers could recall detailed information about the reason for works while others had limited awareness of this. Northern customers typically had limited awareness of the reasons for planned works. Commuters tended to be more aware than leisure or business passengers. Awareness of broader plans for network upgrades and Network Rail's Railway Upgrade Plan was generally low

Passengers highlighted the **point of ticket purchase** as a key time to be given information about upcoming planned works. It was also suggested that **a range of media sources be used** to inform the public about upcoming works, including social media, on trains or in stations (posters and video) and directly to passengers through SMS or e-mail

# Passenger views and experiences of travelling during planned engineering works



# Participants often fail to distinguish between planned and unplanned engineering works

Some participants were able to distinguish between planned and unplanned and made the distinction between knowing about the works in advance compared to being affected without warning. Others struggled to make the distinction. Participants were typically able to distinguish at a theoretical level between planned and unplanned engineering works, however for some this distinction was unimportant as their main focus was on the impact of the engineering works on their lives.

## Reasons for not distinguishing between planned and unplanned engineering works

- Not being aware of planned engineering works taking place (more likely to be leisure/business passengers)
- Lack of information or information not sought about the reasons for disruption experienced
- Low interest in the reasons for the disruption leading to participants not necessarily remembering or caring whether or not it was planned/unplanned engineering

*“Unless it’s something big that’s happening, so the Severn Tunnel I knew about, but pretty much everything else I’ve not known about.”*  
(Newport, Commuter)

*“The only way I’d know is the difference in the organisation in terms of replacements. We all know that if it’s planned, there’s probably going to be a coach there waiting for you, whereas if it’s unplanned you might be waiting half an hour, an hour waiting for them to organise everything.”*  
(Leeds, Commuter)

# Passengers highlighted a range of ways in which they were impacted by planned works (1 of 2)

The extent of impacts mentioned ranged from those which were minimal and negligible, through to those which passengers felt had caused significant negative consequences. The following areas were typically highlighted:

## Impacts on work

For instance needing to cancel meetings, work remotely. Some were unable to perform aspects of their role, or to spend as much time as they wished to at work

## Loss of time

Due to extended journeys passengers lost time which would have either been spent at work or with families

*“They put on buses...but it takes ten minutes to get to Oxford from Long Hanborough, but the bus would take up to 45 minutes, and then we had to wait to get to the train to London. So my hour and five minute journey to London could turn into two, two and a half hours. So on occasions I would actually get in my car and drive.”*  
(Oxford, Leisure and Business)

*“Traffic’s a lot heavier than it is on the trains so it takes ten minutes on the train but in the car, it takes 30, 40 minutes.”*  
(Leeds, Commuter)

# Passengers highlighted a range of ways in which they were impacted by planned works (2 of 2)

## Impacts on self

For instance increased stress, tiredness frustration and worry

*"I was able to still complete the journey, but I had to leave earlier than planned, and I still got there later than I had hoped, this was quite stressful for me."*

(Community Member, Exeter)

## Impact on finance

For instance costs of petrol and parking for those who switched to road, sunk costs of paying for unused season tickets. Some felt replacement services gave less value than usual tickets

*"It's annoying when you've already pre-bought your tickets. When you've got a monthly one and you can't use it."*

(Leeds, Commuter)

## Impacts on travel plans

Some journeys both for work and leisure were cancelled on account of planned works

*"I travelled only when I had to. So I have staff in Swindon so I went there only if I really needed to have face-to-face meetings. So I probably went on half a dozen journeys less."*

(Newport, Commuter)

## Highlighted impacts were similar to those mentioned in 2012, but varied by location (1 of 2)

The ways in which participants described being impacted by planned engineering works are similar to those highlighted in the 2012 research. Participants were also asked to comment on the 2012 research, and most felt that the impacts previously highlighted were still applicable. The only impact previously highlighted which was questioned was 'making certain lifestyles unsustainable' which some participants felt overstated things

There were however some particular impacts which were highlighted in different locations:

### Bristol

- Particular concern about the impact on traffic, especially to Bath
- Rail replacement buses were a top of mind concern

### Newport

- Flights from Cardiff to London City were noted as a viable alternative to trains during planned works

### Oxford

- Driving to Banbury to catch trains from here was an alternative for some

### Reading

- Driving was not typically considered to be a realistic option for trips to London

# There were mixed views on whether planned works are being managed well

Where passengers felt that works had been well managed, the following factors were highlighted:

The amount of notice given



Support for the idea behind the works



Minimal levels of delay



Well organised replacement services



Leisure and business travellers were more negative about their experiences than commuters – more likely to have been unaware of unplanned works and experienced the effects without being prepared for them or been able to make alternative plans

Where passengers felt that works had not been well managed, the following factors were cited:

The experience of rail replacement buses



Scepticism about whether stated timings are accurate



Not being aware of works in advance of travel



Perceiving that the service offered is the bare minimum



Negative experiences with staff



Works overrunning



# Passenger views of when planned engineering works should take place and for how long





# Carrying out work overnight was the most commonly preferred option

Participants were asked which of the following options for carrying out planned engineering works they felt was most appropriate. Participants in the focus groups and online community typically selected either Option B or C, with most choosing C. Option C was mainly chosen because it would cause the least disruption to all passengers and would be more customer-focused. There was no difference between passenger types with regard to which scenario they preferred. Option B was more commonly selected by Northern participants than those using GWR (although C still preferred overall) due to the shorter duration of disruption and perceptions that few would use the train after 10pm

## Option A

- Work at weekends only
- Trains run normally Mon-Fri
- Duration = One year (changed to Six months for Northern groups)

## Option B

- Work overnight only
- Trains run normally 5.30am – 10pm
- Duration = Four months

## Option C

- Work overnight only
- Trains run normally 5.30am – midnight
- Duration = Five months



## Option D

- Railway closed entirely for Six weeks
- Duration = Six weeks

## Option E

- Railway closed entirely for three x blocks of Three weeks
- Duration = Three and a half months

Of the 22 GWR community participants, 15 selected option C as their preferred option; six selected option B and one selected option A

# Overnight works were seen to minimise disruption

The rationale for overnight works was that participants felt the volume of travel was likely to be low at that time, and so this approach would minimise disruption to travellers

*"I would be quite impressed, actually, because I would think, surely, that's when they should be doing any kind of transport works, at night time when services or roads or train is not being used. I'd actually feel quite impressed that they were spending extra money and doing overnight work to get it done quicker."*

(Oxford, Leisure and Business)

*"Not many users will be using it at that time, and it does not disrupt the 9:00am to 5:00pm working people, or weekends, so leisure as well."*

(Leeds, Commuter)

*"I suggest that work is carried out at night time to minimise the disruption as much as possible... People do not travel overnight whereas when work is carried out over... weekends it continues to cause disruption yet in my opinion to a different clientele and more the likes of families etc. To close the railway would be completely unfeasible... Working through the night would therefore not impact commuters."*

(Community Member, Portsmouth)

## There were a small number of advantages noted for a concentrated closure

Participants noted some advantages which a concentrated closure of the line had over a longer period of ongoing disruption

Gets all disruption out of way in one block

Easier to understand

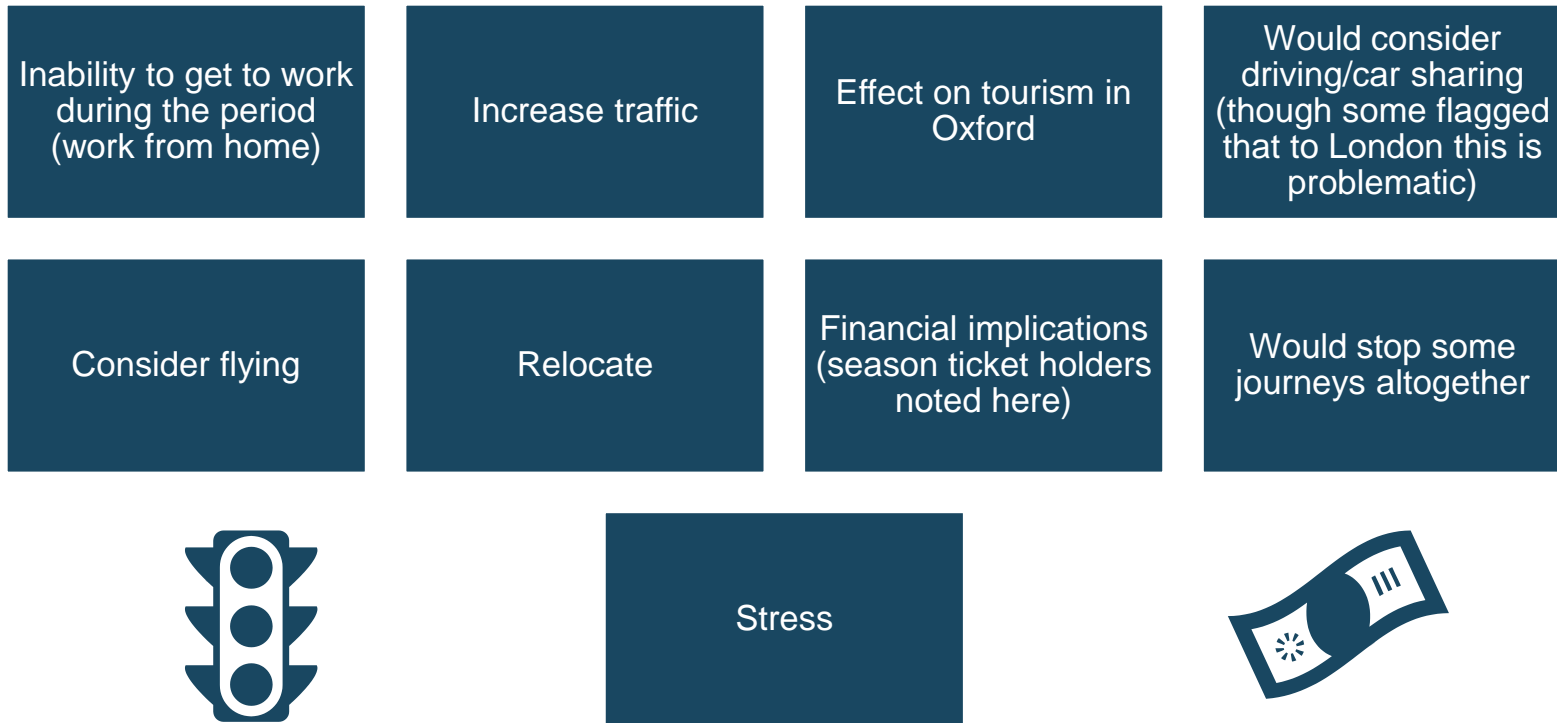
More suitable for shorter journeys

*"I would just say you're going to have disruption anyway, so actually, to know that it's six weeks on the trot, you can make plans for whatever you need to do in that six weeks. I'd rather just literally have it for that time and be done, than keep breaking it up and it just going over a longer period." (Bristol, Commuter)*

*"We knew the tunnel was closed for six weeks. There was no 'It's open for two, it's closed for two, it's open for two.' It was really easy to get your head around." (Newport, Commuter)*

# Concentrated closures were typically perceived negatively

When participants reflected on the relative advantages and disadvantages of a concentrated closure compared to ongoing disruption to part of the timetable, participants typically felt that the concentrated closure would have a far greater negative impact. The following areas in particular were highlighted:



## Concentrated closures were felt to be problematic at all times in the year, however school holidays were felt to have the least impact

Participants typically felt that there was no particular time of year which was suitable for concentrated closures. This group often felt that disruption would be so significant that it would be disruptive at any point. Among those who did have a preference however, school holidays were often highlighted as a preferable time for works to take place. Northern participants were asked when they wanted to know if there were concentrated closures. Participants typically wanted to know as far in advance as possible, but at least three months before the works so that they could plan holidays

*“The school summer holidays and half terms are the ideal time of year for planned engineering works. I initially baulked at that, but then we figured that actually, the roads are a lot quieter in school summer holidays and half terms as well. The one route into Cornwall notwithstanding. My commute to work is halved just by being in the school holidays. So, actually, if you’re taking people off trains and putting them on to the roads, it’s not so bad.” (Oxford, Commuter)*

*“I think most people will either go away on holiday or, like, do different things with the kids.” (Manchester, Commuter)*



# Christmas was typically not seen as suitable for closures, except in Reading, Leeds (commuters) and Oxford

A number of concerns were raised about carrying out works over Christmas

However in Reading and Oxford, where the line had been closed during the Christmas period 2016, some felt that Christmas shutdowns could be viable

It is a key time of year for visiting families

Darker and colder days are seen to be worse times for any delays

*"I find it bizarre that they do so much engineering work between Christmas and New Year when people are trying to get to see their family."* (Newport, Commuter)

*"Christmas. I know last year they did a lot of line closures around the Christmas, New Year break. A lot of people tend to be off work or winding down, so there's a lot of holiday, schools broken up."* (Reading, Leisure and Business)

# Passenger views of bus/coach services during engineering works



Passenger Experiences and Priorities during Planned Engineering Works

# Experiences of bus replacement services were mainly negative across locations

Across all locations, passengers shared negative experiences of rail replacement buses. The move itself from train to bus was seen as an inconvenience and particularly stressful when there were too many passengers for the size of the bus. There was a feeling of uncertainty about how much longer the journey would take when factoring in road traffic and station stops along the way. Replacement buses were described as uncomfortable, with a lack of toilets, Wi-Fi and space to move around – this is particularly frustrating for those who were unaware of the planned engineering and who paid for and expected a train journey

- Inconvenient
- Stressful
- Uncertain journey time
- Uncomfortable
- Lack of facilities
- Frustrating
- Multiple stops

*“It’s the uncertainty isn’t it. When you get on a bus, you just don’t know how long you’re going to be on there.”*  
(Newport, Commuter)



Passengers from Portsmouth and Swansea commented on their experiences of missing connections due to taking a rail replacement bus. Missed connections can also result in additional taxi costs

*“Used a replacement bus service whilst travelling to London. Experience was OK but just delayed the journey time which was not good.”*  
(Gloucester, Business)

*“I found it to be a nightmare because one little one will turn up and, as you said, wait for it to fill up, and then the next one will come in, like, another twenty minutes. By that time, you could have got half-way there and it’s just frustrating.”* (Manchester, Commuter)



# Staff managing the bus replacement services were mostly seen as helpful and knowledgeable, though with some less positive experiences

There was a view that railway staff were typically helpful, available and knowledgeable when passengers were transferring from the train to the bus. In Reading and Leeds however, some passengers felt that staff were not always aware of how to best support passengers

*"I've generally found that station staff are normally really quite pleasant and good and nice and apologetic."*  
(Oxford, Commuter)

*"I've always seen them within sight quite quickly when you get out of the train. Sometimes there have been people there saying, 'Bus replacements this way'."* (Newport, Commuter)

*"Well, the inspector, he took me out from the platform, walked me around, showed me."*  
(Reading, Leisure and Business)



*"At Saltaire station, because the bus can't get down, the coach to the actual station, so it stops a few streets away, there's nobody there to tell you where it is. There needs to be somebody stewarding at the station to direct people."*  
(Leeds, Leisure and Business)

Passengers from Oxford noted that other angry and frustrated passengers add to the negative experience. They also highlighted a lack of support for disabled or vulnerable passengers who are less able to get on the bus

# Neither coaches nor buses were seen as ideal replacements for the train however perceptions and experiences of coaches were more positive

There was a slight difference in both perception and experience of replacement buses and coaches

## Perception

In some groups, passengers were asked for their perceptions of a 'replacement bus' and in others passengers were asked for perceptions of a 'replacement coach'. The groups for whom the term 'replacement coach' was used were more positive. Coaches were also perceived as being faster than buses

*"Coach sounds a bit more comfortable... Bus is, sort of, your bus around Reading, you've got your stops for locals."*  
(Reading, Leisure and Business)

*"It also seems slower as well, buses for some reason. Coaches do seem to go a bit faster."*  
(Bristol, Leisure and Business)

## Experience

Experiences also differed between the two. Coaches were described as being more comfortable, with similar facilities to the train (i.e. air conditioning, toilets and sockets). The coach were also said to be better than the bus, as they are easier for carrying luggage

*"The coach was comfortable and I was given a free coffee to take on board."*  
(Exeter, Commuter and Leisure)

*"It is luck of the draw, you either get a top of the range flash coach, and the next people in the queue end up with an old crappy bus."*  
(Leeds, Leisure and Business)

# Passengers would typically prefer to take a diverted train than a shorter journey on a rail replacement bus/coach

*"Sometimes if you aren't in a particular rush it can just be easier to stay put. I also have a four year old who gets travel sick in cars and buses but not trains so I would take the longer train journey."* (Portsmouth, Leisure)



*"I would rather sit on the train for an extra 40 minutes than having the hassle of having to get off the train half way, get all of my luggage off."* (Plymouth, Commuter)

It was considered to be too much stress and hassle to have to move from the comfort of the train to a potentially very uncomfortable bus/coach.

Factors such as carrying luggage or travelling with young children would also add to the stress of taking a bus or coach instead of a train. Business and commuter passengers also like to be able to work on the train, which they struggle to do on a bus or coach



Passengers who are in a rush would be more likely to take the bus/coach. Commuting passengers in Leeds and Manchester where commuting times are typically shorter were often only prepared to incur an additional 20-30 minutes on the train rather than change for a bus. Passengers found it difficult to believe however, that the bus/coach replacement would be quicker than the train particularly when considering the time it would take to transfer passengers from one mode of transport to another. Road traffic disruption was also noted to impact the predictability of the bus/coach journey time

Passengers from Reading were asked whether they would take a slow bus for three stops and a faster express coach for the remainder of the journey

This received mixed responses. It would depend on whether passengers are carrying luggage and whether the bus would be waiting on arrival. Some said they would do this if it would save half an hour. Some felt they would still prefer to stay on the train

# Impact on passenger attitudes and behaviours based on historic exposure to disruption



# A range of common habit changes were identified as a result of planned engineering works

Passengers have changed their mode of transport, changed the time or day of travel and avoided Sunday or bank holiday travel. Experience of planned engineering work leads to a general awareness that these things happen, which in turn leads to more of a likelihood to plan travel

*"I regularly check the notices displayed in the stations for forthcoming engineering works and factor these in to my working diary." (Gloucester, Commuter and Leisure)*

*"I have had a few occasions where it's affected me, so I did start going online and just trying to, I think I looked at Northern Rail, whoever I'm using I'll just go on their website and see if there's anything because they have a bit that says, you know, what's planned." (Manchester, Leisure and Business)*

*"I've used the tram or probably the buses more. I used to just use the train but I probably use the bus more now than I did." (Manchester, Commuter)*

- Checking for engineering works
- Changed mode of transport
- Changed time or day of travel
- Purchased a different ticket type
- Bought tickets at the counter in person (expecting to be told about planned engineering works)
- Car sharing
- Negotiated flexitime

*"I negotiated a bit of flexitime to accommodate the unpredictable arrival times at work and things like that." (Bristol, Commuter)*

## Temporary habit changes

- Avoid travelling completely
- Use a different rail operator
- Using tram more (Manchester)

## Passengers from Reading who had experienced a number of recent planned engineering works highlighted several habit changes

Passengers in Reading had recently experienced a number of planned engineering works, including the refurbishment of Reading station and work over the Christmas period. These passengers also reported a number of changes to their habits. This included changes such as purchasing a weekly ticket instead of an annual ticket, purchasing tickets at the counter in person so as to hear news about planned engineering works, and changing the day of travel from a Monday to a Sunday night

*"I only ever buy weekly now... it got to me that I'd forked out all that amount of money for one, and then a couple of times there were engineering works."*

(Reading, Commuter)

*"I've got a certain business trip I do once a month, which I'll now do at a completely different time, I'll do it on a Sunday night as opposed to a Monday morning... just because of a couple of times where I've been mucked up on a Monday morning."*

(Reading, Commuter)

# Passengers typically continued to travel by rail after planned engineering works

Passengers highlighted a number of adjustments to their routines, such as checking more frequently for planned engineering and planning meetings or trips around these. However it was rare for passengers to stop using rail entirely because of this. Even in Reading, where passengers had experienced a great deal of planned engineering in recent months, the railway is still the preferred mode of travel. It was sometimes the case however that it affected when passengers elected to travel

Amongst those who chose not to travel by rail, common habit changes included driving or car sharing and avoiding travel on Sundays or bank holidays. Experience suggests these are the days when planned engineering works are most likely to take place. Passengers have experienced a lot of rail replacement services or have had difficulties with travel or longer journeys in the past on Sundays

## Avoidance of Sunday travel

Although passengers are cautious about Sunday travel, they accept that this has to be the case and that it makes sense given there are less people travelling at this time. They did not have particularly negative views about this and general attitudes towards the rail industry are not affected

*"If I book anything at a weekend, I'm cautious, because I got caught with a lot of bus replacements when I was younger."*  
(Bristol, Commuter)

*"I like the train service. I feel quite sentimental still towards it to some degree. I enjoy just being able to sit and not drive myself and just sit and have coffee and my Kindle and whatever and just enjoy the actual journey time. So, I do think there's still a need for it, especially for certainly longer travel."*  
(Manchester, Commuter)

*"It feels like there's a lot more going on work-wise at the weekend which you'd understand I guess if there's less people on the rail."* (Bristol, Leisure and Business)

# Passengers' attitudes about the rail industry are not typically driven by planned engineering but by broader personal experience

- Passengers who had experienced more unplanned delays generally had more negative views
- There was a level of understanding that planned engineering works need to happen and a hope that this will improve the passenger experience

*"When I lived in London for a few years, there were always obviously TfL strikes, so I was getting a double whammy of transport not getting me from A to B for a long time, so that's probably another reason why." (Newport, Commuter)*

*"I think it needs to be kept safe. Planned works are fine, as long as you know about it. It's absolutely necessary. I'd rather they do the works." (Leeds, Leisure and Business)*

*"I'm a lot less confident in trains, but that's because most of the train journeys I've been on maybe in the last few years have been around London, Slough, Reading area, and there are a lot of unplanned things that happen." (Newport, Commuter)*



# Among those whose attitudes have changed, this most commonly meant more checking of journey details, or changing time of travel

Where planned engineering works had affected passenger attitudes, this was commonly a cumulative effect from exposure to multiple works. It made passengers more inclined to check journey details before travelling, and in some cases encouraged them to travel at different times in order to feel more confident in reaching their destination. It had most commonly affected passengers' perceptions of travel on Sundays. There was more confidence in the railway during the week

## Some experiences which formed this view of Sunday travel include:

- Planned engineering often happening on Sundays
- Experience of lots of rail replacement buses/coaches on Sundays
- Longer journeys on Sundays, as a result of planned engineering and replacement services
- Expectation of the rail service to be slower on Sundays

*"The weekend is the time when they do the main, sort of, body of the work and yes, if there's going to be a diversion or a bus then it's going to be that." (Reading, Commuter)*

## Confidence in reaching the destination

There was less confidence that passengers would reach the destination in a timely manner for longer journeys that might involve several connections. This was mentioned by passengers who had experienced being stranded at a station after the train had been cancelled

# Passengers plan more for long distance or weekend journeys

Whether or not passengers check the status of their journey before travelling is dependent on the type and length of the journey. Passengers tended to check more for long distance leisure and business trips, or for trips that are less familiar than the usual commute. All passenger types will check before travelling on a Sunday. There was perceived to be less of a need to check for short leisure trips amongst both commuters and leisure/business passengers

Some commuters had experienced problems with planned engineering in the past and as a result will now check their journey more frequently. These passengers are however, more likely to check all aspects of the journey, including train times, number of changes and cancellations. They will check the night before or on the day of travel

Other passengers mentioned their travel habits hadn't changed much after experiencing planned engineering, as these were seen as 'one off' experiences or not seen a priority for changing planning habits

*"I tend to do, kind of like, a night before thing. So, if I know that I've got to be in London by 8:30, at 10:00 the night before, I'll go and look, are there delays?"*  
(Oxford, Commuter)

*"I used to quite frequently go into Bolton on a weekend but now I'm not going to do that because it's a replacement bus. So, I may as well drive and just park where I have to, with the kids. So, just, sort of, thought of maybe changing things a little bit."*  
(Manchester, Commuter)

*"My travel habits have not changed at all due to planned engineering works. They don't hugely impact the journeys that I have to make by train."*  
(Exeter, Commuter)

# When passengers plan their journeys can range from weeks in advance to on the day

Passengers who check the status of their journey the night before or the day of travel are checking for train times and for any unplanned delays in addition to any planned engineering. During planned engineering, passengers will check on a weekly basis, or 2-3 days in advance. For longer leisure journeys passengers will check much further in advance (between 4-6 weeks)

*"I check at my rail station a day or two in advance of my travel, to make sure I can get to my destination on the day and in time."*  
(Swansea, Commuter and Leisure)

*"As soon as I am asked to travel to work by train I will check online to make sure that no planned works are taking place."*  
(Exeter, Leisure)

*"If I am planning to use the train over a weekend or holiday period and taking a trip with the family. I could check up to... four weeks in advance."* (Gloucester, Business)

# Passengers mainly check their journey online or at the station

Passengers mainly check for information about any planned engineering works at the same time as buying their ticket. This can be online whereby passengers will look for a flag alerting them to engineering works, or at the train station where passengers will look out for signs and posters

Some passengers from Swansea phoned 2-3 days before to check the status of their journey or they will check at the station a couple of days before. Others use the National Rail website

*"I'll check in the mornings going out because it's just, like, as I have my coffee I'm just, 'That needs doing', but I never think to check when I'm leaving work."*  
(Reading, Commuter)

In Leeds and Manchester some passengers checked for commuting and leisure/business whereas others only checked for leisure/business journeys

Passengers from Reading were more likely to check the status of their journey on the morning of a commute but not on the way home

*"Say if I'm on my normal nine to five train, I just turn up. If I'm going somewhere else, I constantly look at Northern Rail to see what time they're due at home and stuff."*  
(Leeds, Commuter)

*"Trainline, I always go on it every day to see if there are any delays."*  
(Newport, Leisure and Business)

For Newport passengers, there was not much of a difference between checking for work or leisure. There is an understanding that engineering works do happen and that regular checking is important

## For some passengers, checking the status of the journey is not a priority

Passengers are less likely to check the status of short journeys for leisure when being on time is less of a priority. Passengers won't always pay attention to signs and posters at the station, particularly if they are rushing for the train. Other passengers were less concerned about planning their journey because they are able to use other rail operators

Passengers from Plymouth said they will only check their journey status if it is bad weather, if it is a longer journey or they will check on the morning of their commute

*"I would only check the status / availability of the rail services if it is bad weather and there is a possibility of the train being delayed or cancelled."* (Plymouth, Commuter)

*"I think, if there have been any signs up or anything then you do, but generally I just don't. I mean, there's a train every half an hour, so I don't tend to plan."*  
(Oxford, Leisure and Business)

Passengers located in Oxford generally do check before they travel, however colleagues may book tickets on their behalf which will mean they will not check. The availability of several other train services also reduces the likelihood of checking

Passengers located in Bristol said that they pay little attention to planned engineering, for short journeys in particular. There is some caution at weekends and commuting, however this did not necessarily mean that passengers did extra planning

*"Sometimes I'll see something online but I'll tend to see something and skim over it and not have a good read until it then affects me."*  
(Bristol, Leisure and Business)

# There were mixed opinions about whether the railway industry can be trusted to deliver a good service during planned engineering

Overall perceptions of the railway industry in relation to their management of planned engineering were positive. Leisure and business passengers from Bristol and Newport were more negative with their views. For some bus replacement services were not felt to be an equivalent service to a train journey.

*"For where I go, I'd say they're pretty good."*  
(Reading, Leisure and Business)

*"Sometimes it's a bit sketchy, on what's happening and what's coming up. It's, sort of, 'Right, we're doing this and this', and then when we might want something with a lot more to it and a lot more redirecting that we had to go. Then, when I looked the other day when I was going, it was really good information."*  
(Manchester, Leisure and Business)

*"I think it's a two-way thing. They're going to be broadcasting it, but you've got to be in tune."*  
(Oxford, Commuter)

*"I trust them. I know I'm contradicting myself, but the bus I did use, the staff were very friendly. To be fair, it was only at the stations it stopped. It was straight in and straight out. So in a way, it was good, but it does take up a lot of time."*  
(Leeds, Leisure and Business)

*"I don't think I ever had trust and confidence in them."*  
(Newport, Leisure and Business)

Bristol and Newport leisure and business passengers noted they have a negative view of the rail industry as a whole, which is mainly due to unplanned works. These experiences have an impact on perceptions of planned engineering works

# There were positive and negative opinions towards finishing planned engineering work on time

*“So whatever went wrong, what corrective actions did they put in place this time, which reflected last time’s failures. No one knows, the public doesn’t know.”*  
(Newport, Leisure and Business)

*“I think when they say, ‘From January to March,’ or whatever, you know straightaway, you think, ‘Well, that’s April.’ For some reason you think, ‘It won’t be March’.”*  
(Manchester, Leisure and Business)

*“I’d expect them to do it. If they say they’re going to do it, then they should do it, and most of the time they do deliver.”*  
(Leeds, Leisure and Business)

*“I think they’re quite cautious with their timescales. I think they have to be. So, if it’s a seven day job they’ll say ‘for the next ten days there might be interruptions’.”*  
(Oxford, Commuter)

*“My experience is they’ve always been finished by the time when I’ve needed it again, so I’ve been able to plan around for whenever it was and then my normal commute hasn’t been affected after that.”*  
(Reading, Commuter)

*“I’ve not been in a situation where I’ve seen the planned engineering works being extended without knowing about it.”*  
(Oxford, Leisure & Business)

# Low awareness around planned engineering and negative perceptions of the rail industry as a whole contribute to the view that planned works overrun

## Factors that explain why people felt the works would overrun

- Communications about planned engineering displaying an end date which is different to the actual date it finishes
- A perceived lack of transparency around why the engineering works happen and why they overrun
- A negative perception of the railway industry which is mainly driven by experiences of unplanned delays and cancellations
- The belief that public works in general can face unexpected problems and resulting delays

*“I don’t really trust many engineers’ time frames, when they say they’re going to close them for a certain time, you always think, ‘This could go on either days or weeks’.” (Reading, Leisure and Business)*

*“I think they start, don’t they, with just an end date, and then they remove the end date.” (Manchester, Leisure and Business)*

*“[It would be] a good thing if they did explain to the public what actions they have put in place, ‘Yes we did this wrong, and this what we’re going to do right next time’.” (Newport, Leisure and Business)*



# Awareness and attitudes towards Network Rail's Railway Upgrade Plan



Passenger Experiences and Priorities during Planned Engineering Works

# Overall there was a some awareness of the reasons why smaller scale planned engineering took place, but passengers were typically not aware of the details

Passengers expressed a general awareness that planned engineering occurs to keep the train lines safe for passengers and to improve the service in some way. They were unable to provide further detail than this however

*"Not much, just they're looking after the tracks."* (Newport, Commuter)

*"Safety, keeping things moving, I suppose."* (Reading, Commuter)

*"Sometimes its bridge repairs or cable wire theft."*  
(Leeds, Leisure and Business)

*"They just said modernising the rail or something."*  
(Newport, Leisure and Business)

*"Normally, it's because they're trying to make it better for us as users and things like that."* (Bristol, Commuter)

# Passengers were more aware of the reasons behind the large scale engineering works

Passengers were more aware of large scale engineering works, particularly the electrification of the lines. Passengers were able to recall advertisements about the electrification work, which they understood to be improving the train lines to be more efficient and better for the environment

“Severn Tunnel”

“Crossrail”

“Electrification”

GWR Leisure and business passengers were less aware of the reasons than commuters, however Northern commuter, business and leisure passengers were equally aware. Leisure and business passengers from Oxford were particularly negative about the reasons behind the engineering works, with the view that the network is being repaired due to neglect rather than modernising works taking place

*“I think you'll more associate that with west coast or east coast main line upgrades, or HS2 or any of that stuff, or CrossLink or CrossThames, whatever it is, but round here you don't really get a lot of major stuff like that. Electrification was as big as it got.”*  
(Bristol, Commuter)

*“I think they're electrifying it from what I've read.”*  
(Leeds, Leisure and Business)

# Passengers showed little awareness of Network Rail's Railway Upgrade Plan

Passengers were generally not familiar with the network upgrade plans more broadly. There were few exceptions where passengers had seen advertising or media coverage around this

*"Especially if you're commuting, you're probably so busy just getting on with what you're doing, you're not really engaging when you've got billboards and stuff."*

(Bristol, Leisure and Business)

*"[The Check before you travel poster] looks vaguely familiar, I may have seen this out of the corner of my eye whilst walking through a station but I am normally in a rush."*

(Gloucester, Commuter and Leisure)

## There are mixed views about whether passengers should be informed about the wider upgrades to the network



There was a general lack of interest in the wider upgrades. The circumstances in which there would be more interest would be if the engineering works directly benefit or impact local passengers or if engineers were building something new or exciting

Other passengers noted that knowing the reasons behind the engineering works would encourage more of an understanding

*“Unless it was something really exciting and interesting like electrifying the lines, and then getting you into London in less than an hour.”*  
(Bristol, Commuter)

*“The fact that they haven't told me exactly what was going on made me feel quite resentful of the operator really.”*  
(Portsmouth, Commuter)

*“Knowing why it is happening helps understanding and therefore encourages empathy.”* (Gloucester, Leisure)

*“I think it, sort of, helps you a bit better to understand, if you know what they're doing and why they're doing it, rather than just say, 'We're doing work', and not knowing what it is. I don't know, it just sits better.”*  
(Manchester, Commuter)

# How passengers want to be informed about forthcoming works



Passenger Experiences and Priorities during Planned Engineering Works

# Passengers were informed about planned engineering through a number of sources

Passengers of all types were positive about the way they were informed about the planned engineering, with the exception of some passengers who found out on the day at the train station and experienced disruption to their journey



National Rail, Northern and GWR websites at the point of booking tickets



(Rarely) Social media e.g. Facebook & Twitter



Letters and leaflets through the post – particularly for larger scale engineering works



Local radio, news channels and newspapers – particularly for larger scale planned engineering



Posters/notices/displays at train stations, or on train seatbacks. Both in advance and on the day



Word of mouth – via other passengers and employers

# Northern engineering works posters felt to be informative, however the title and graphic were felt to be misleading



Title typically interpreted as changes to timetables and not engineering works – some would not read further

Graphic not associated with engineering works – cone associated with roads

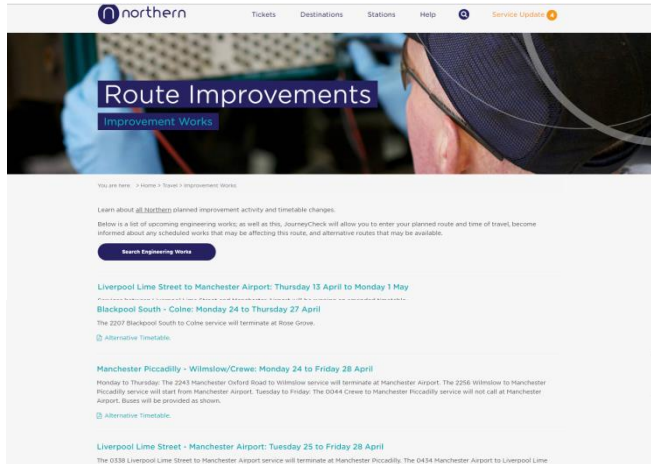
Eye-catching colour. Useful information and would result in passengers checking train times but unlikely to read poster due to title and graphic. Some wanted the bank holidays to be listed

*"It's not clear. It just says, 'changed the train times'. It doesn't say anything clearly about engineering works that you can see, initially. That just says 'a change to train times'."*  
(Leeds, Leisure and Business)

*"I'd think they were trying to do it quite, you know, trying to be trendy but it's not working'."*  
(Manchester, Leisure and Business)



# Northern engineering works page was felt to be thorough and straightforward, however the search function could be more prominent



The Northern website was not commonly viewed by participants

Some participants had been sent links via email and social media to this page and appreciated this

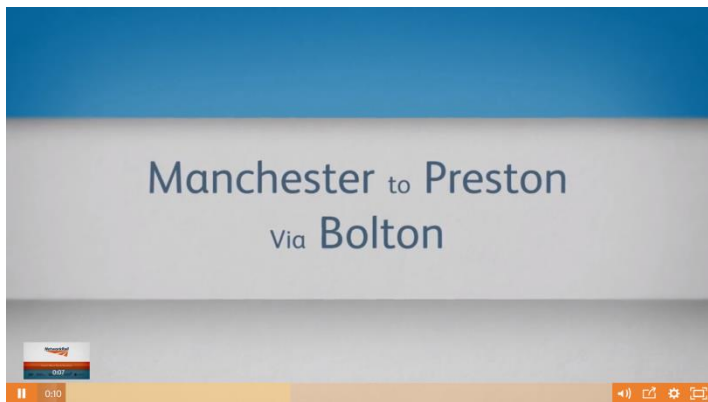
Some others had visited the engineering works page from the home page

*“It’s pretty good. It’s giving you enough information and then it’s also giving you the alternative timetable as well.”*  
(Manchester, Commuter)

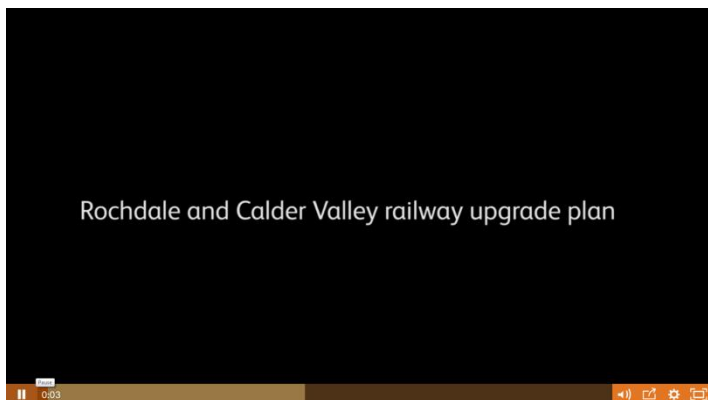
- ✓ Clear information about routes affected
- ✓ Information felt to be comprehensive
- ✓ Alternative timetable included

*“It told you everything that was going on, on the dates, and the bus replacements.”*  
(Leeds, Leisure and Business)

# The videos were felt to be an engaging way of explaining the works and generated interest in the wider network upgrade programme



- ✓ Engaging media for explaining the need for engineering works
- ✓ Generates interest in the works beyond how passengers are personally affected
- ✓ Effectively gets across the scale of the improvement works
- ✓ Positively frames the reasons for doing the works



*"I think if you were affected by the works to a big degree, so obviously living around the Rochdale area or dealing with that station, then it's quite comprehensive enough that you could understand what was going on, why it was taking as long as it was."*

(Leeds, Leisure and Business)

*"If that was an advert, if that was just being played, say, on local TV, you know, as an advert, maybe just in something like, at tea time or something like that, you'd stop and maybe take note, and after that, you'd think, 'Oh right, right, that's what it's all about'."*

(Manchester, Leisure and Business)

# Ideal routes for communication about planned engineering were mostly in line with 2012, but with some additional suggestions

Passengers agreed that various different communication sources are needed to reach all audiences. In contrast to 2012, passengers preferred the idea of putting posters on trains rather than at stations

Passengers across locations noted a need for more details on rail replacement buses/coaches. Passengers would like to know how long the wait will be for replacement services and how long the journey is expected to take

## At point of purchase

Online, it is important to clearly indicate the planned engineering is happening in big, red writing. At the train station staff should inform passengers when they buy the ticket. It should also be flagged on the ticket machine and on sandwich boards

## SMS/email alerts

Provide opportunity to give contact details and typical train routes and provide tailored information on planned works. This can easily be done for season ticket holders, as they can provide their contact details at the point of purchasing their season ticket

## Social Media

NEW

Use Facebook pages, such as local newspapers (e.g. Get Reading) and/or rail operator websites where passengers purchase their tickets. It should be clearly indicated on signs at stations that passengers can check online and on social media

## On trains

NEW

On the back of seats or posters in the train itself so that passengers can read during their journeys. This is seen to be better than putting posters up at stations where passengers are often rushing through to catch their train

## Videos explaining the works

NEW

Northern passengers suggested playing the videos of engineering works at stations



# Conclusions



# Conclusions (1 of 2)

There are some changes evident since the 2012 research, but many of the findings in this study are consistent with what was previously seen. Participants also typically agreed with the majority of the 2012 findings which they were asked to comment on. We would therefore not recommend a wholesale repeat of the 2012 quantitative study. Specific changes of interest could be investigated further with ad hoc research if this is required

Some passengers are interested in more details about the reasons behind planned engineering works. It would be of value to these passengers if future communications were designed so as interested parties can quickly and easily access information about why works are taking place and how this is expected to benefit the network in future. The videos shown to Northern participants about engineering works were felt to be an effective way of showing the scale and benefits of the works and could be shown at stations

Passengers would appreciate the use of a range of communication channels to promote awareness of upcoming works. This includes communication in stations and on trains in advance of works, through social and traditional media, direct messages to customers and at the point of purchase

# Conclusions (2 of 2)

There would be value in assessing whether the process for compensating season ticket holders who are impacted by planned engineering works can be made quicker or more straightforward for passengers

Where possible, passengers prefer to use rail replacement coaches rather than buses for longer journeys. It may be valuable to consider whether improvements can be made to the passenger experience of replacement buses, such as through assisting passengers with luggage or children, and further assistance for vulnerable passengers

# Technical note



# Demographic breakdown of focus groups - GWR

Recruitment specifications for each of the focus groups were as follows:

<p><b>Group 1: Long distance commuters, Oxford</b>          All to be <u>long distance commuters</u>, travelling &gt;25 minutes per journey.          -Participants to be a mix of those who use the main line and those who use secondary or branch lines          -All to typically travel by train in this way at least 3 <u>weekdays</u> per week          -Some participants (3 or more) to also travel by rail at weekend</p>	<p><b>Group 2: Leisure and business passengers, Oxford</b>          -Participants to be a mix of those who use the main line and those who use secondary or branch lines          -Mix of <u>leisure</u> passengers and those who occasionally travel for <u>business</u>          -All to travel by train at least every 2-3 months          -All leisure passengers travel by train at <u>weekends</u></p>
<p><b>Group 3: Short distance commuters, Bristol</b>          -All to be <u>short distance commuters</u>, travelling &lt;25 minutes per journey          -All to typically travel by train in this way at least 3 <u>weekdays</u> per week          -Some participants (3 or more) to also travel by rail at weekend          -Use either the <u>main line or local branch lines</u>          -Also occasionally travel for <u>leisure</u> (every 2-3 months)</p>	<p><b>Group 4: Leisure and business passengers, Bristol</b>          -Participants to be a mix of those who use the main line and those who use secondary or branch lines          -Participants to travel for <u>leisure</u> (4) and <u>business</u> (4)          -All to travel by train at least once every 2-3 months          -All leisure passengers to travel by train at <u>weekends</u></p>
<p><b>Group 5: Long distance commuters, Reading</b>          All to be <u>short distance commuters</u>, travelling &lt;25 minutes per journey.          -Participants to be a mix of those who use the main line and those who use secondary or branch lines          -All to typically travel by train in this way at least 3 <u>weekdays</u> per week          -Some participants (3 or more) to also travel by rail at weekend</p>	<p><b>Group 6: Leisure and business passengers, Reading</b>          -Participants to be a mix of those who use the main line and those who use secondary or branch lines          -Mix of <u>leisure</u> passengers and those who occasionally travel for <u>business</u>          -All to travel by train at least every 2-3 months          -All leisure passengers travel by train at <u>weekends</u></p>
<p><b>Group 7: Short distance commuters, Newport</b>          -All to be <u>long distance commuters</u>, travelling &gt;25 minutes per journey          -All to typically travel by train in this way at least 3 <u>weekdays</u> per week          -Some participants (3 or more) to also travel by rail at weekend          -Use either the <u>main line or local branch lines</u>          -Also occasionally travel for <u>leisure</u> (every 2-3 months)</p>	<p><b>Group 8: Leisure and business passengers, Newport</b>          -Participants to be a mix of those who use the main line and those who use secondary or branch lines          -Participants to travel for <u>leisure</u> (4) and <u>business</u> (4)          -All to travel by train at least every 2-3 months          -All leisure passengers to travel by train at <u>weekends</u></p>



# Demographic breakdown of focus groups - Northern

Recruitment specifications for each of the focus groups were as follows:

<p><b>Group 1: Commuters, Manchester</b></p> <p>All to be using train for <u>commuting</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants to be a mix of those who use the main line and those who use secondary or branch lines</li> <li>- All to travel on any route that goes through BOLTON or journeys to/from Moses Gate, Farnworth, Kearsley or Clifton</li> <li>- All to typically travel by train at least 3 times per week</li> <li>- All travel by train <u>during the week</u></li> <li>- Some participants (3 or more) to also travel by rail at weekend</li> </ul>	<p><b>Group 2: Leisure and business passengers, Manchester</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants to be a mix of those who use the main line and those who use secondary or branch lines</li> <li>- All to travel on any route that goes through BOLTON or journeys to/from Moses Gate, Farnworth, Kearsley or Clifton</li> <li>- Mix of <u>leisure</u> passengers and those who occasionally travel for <u>business</u></li> <li>- All to travel by train at least every 2-3 months</li> <li>- All leisure passengers travel by train at <u>weekends</u></li> </ul>
<p><b>Group 3: Short distance commuters, Leeds</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All to be using train for <u>commuting</u></li> <li>- All to typically travel by train at least 3 times per week</li> <li>- All to travel on any route that goes through HEBDEN BRIDGE or HALIFAX, or journeys to/from Mytholmroyd, Sowerby Bridge, Low Moor, Cross Gates, Garforth, East Garforth, Micklefield, South Milford or Church Fenton</li> <li>- Some participants (3 or more) to also travel by rail at weekend</li> <li>- Use either the <u>main line or local branch lines</u></li> <li>- All travel by train <u>during the week</u></li> <li>- Some participants to occasionally travel for <u>leisure</u></li> </ul>	<p><b>Group 4: Leisure and business passengers, Leeds</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants to be a mix of those who use the main line and those who use secondary or branch lines</li> <li>- All to travel on any route that goes through HEBDEN BRIDGE or HALIFAX, or journeys to/from Mytholmroyd, Sowerby Bridge, Low Moor, Cross Gates, Garforth, East Garforth, Micklefield, South Milford or Church Fenton</li> <li>- Participants to travel for <u>leisure</u> (4) and <u>business</u> (4)</li> <li>- All to travel by train at least once every 2-3 months</li> <li>- All leisure passengers to travel by train at <u>weekends</u></li> </ul>

# Demographic breakdown of online community (GWR only)

Breakdown of online community participants			
<b>Region</b>		<b>Gender</b>	
Portsmouth	6	Male	11
Plymouth	2	Female	11
Exeter	4	<b>Passenger Type</b>	
Gloucester	5	Commuter	12
Swansea	5	Leisure	10
<b>Age</b>		Business	5
21-29	4		
30-39	7		
40-49	3		
50-59	6		
60-69	2		