

# London Waterloo Upgrade

## Qualitative Research

November 2016



bdrc  
group

transportfocus



providing intelligence

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# Background and methodology

## Background and objectives

- South West Trains and Network Rail are upgrading the infrastructure at London Waterloo station to accommodate longer trains and increase passenger capacity at the station, thereby improving the passenger experience. The improvements will mean more seats, longer trains and a bigger, brighter Waterloo
- From 5<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> August 2017 platforms 1-9 will be closed in order to extend platforms 1-4. This will lead to a temporary reduction in capacity and the timetable that can be operated
- Transport Focus, working with South West Trains and Network Rail, wishes to explore passengers' awareness and understanding of the works and to gauge their reactions to the planned alterations and how these are communicated
- BDRC Continental has been commissioned to do this research. This report contains the findings from the qualitative stage

## Methodology

Four focus groups were held (6-7 respondents each), lasting around 90 minutes, two in each of the following locations:



Holborn, London

Wimbledon, London

Groups were conducted on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> November 2016.

More details on the groups on the following slide.

# Who we spoke to

## Key respondent criteria:

- Travel to/from stations that will be affected by the Waterloo Upgrade work (varies from lighter impact to station closure)
- Commute at peak times or travel for business/leisure at least four times a year
- Have travelled by train in the last month

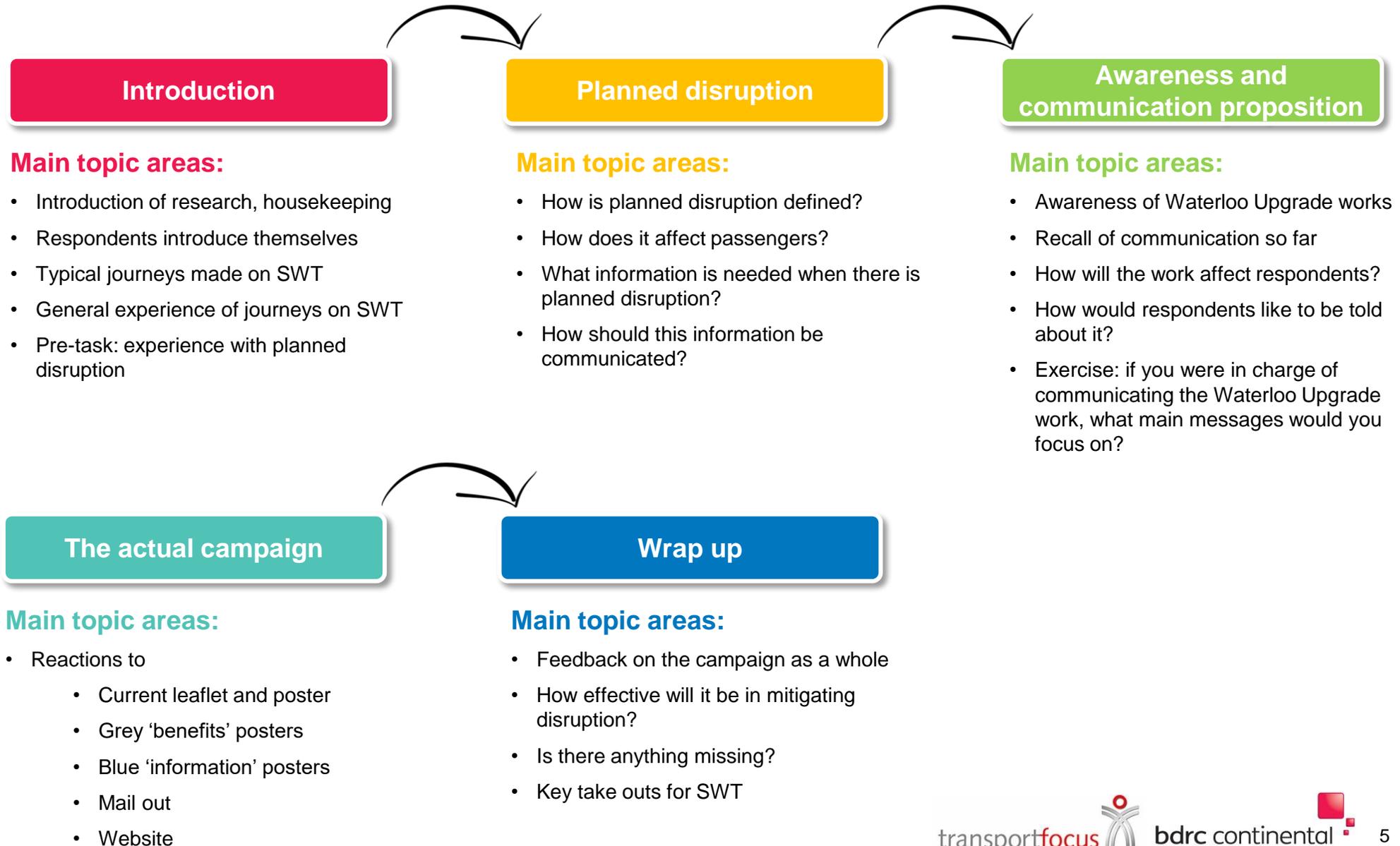


	No. of respondents	Male / female	Age range	Frequency of SWT usage
<b>Group 1</b> <b>Commuters</b> Main lines	6	4/2	50+ years	3+ times a week
<b>Group 2</b> <b>Leisure/</b> <b>business</b>	7	4/3	25-39 years	1. Between twice a week and once a month 2. Between twice a week and once a month 3. 3 + times a week 5. 3 + times a week 6. 3 + times a week 7. 3 + times a week



<b>Group 3</b> <b>Commuters</b> Guildford – Waterloo routes	7	3/4	30-55 years	3+ times a week
<b>Group 4</b> <b>Commuters</b> Shepperton – Waterloo route	6	3/3	18-29 years	3+ times a week

# Discussion guide flow used for the groups



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# The context: Meaning of planned disruption



## Meaning

- Engineering work during weekends
- Replacement bus journeys that add a lot of time to journey
- Long wait at stations
- Strikes (passengers seem more aware of advance notice for strikes than for planned disruption)

*'Sunday engineering work!'*

## Frustrations

- With timings of disruption - works being done when big events are on and a large number of people is trying to attend these, e.g. sports events
- How disruption is managed and communicated to passengers – lack of information (e.g. alternatives, extra time needed, etc.) and not obvious enough (often just a small whiteboard at the station)



*Image from passenger illustrating planned disruption*

*'Pain for a month but it will be worth it!'*

*'Don't panic. It will be better in the future.'*

*'No pain no gain!'*

*'It would be good to know at least 3-4 days in advance.'*



*Image from passenger illustrating planned disruption*

- Travellers usually understand that disruption needs to happen
- And most are fine about disruption as long as they know about it in advance
- SWT generally have 'a good record' – passengers feel like it has been a few years since any big engineering works have taken place

# The context: Communication of planned disruption



- Most passengers do not actively look out for announcements/ communication about disruption
  - Many monitor the scrolling text on the board of the train and on the screens on platforms (CIS) and think these should be used to communicate disruption
  - A minority check on Google/Twitter just before making a journey
- They want TOCs to be proactive in communicating disruption and the communication to be tailored personally to them e.g. about the route they travel on

*'Use the lot (of communication channels)!'*

- TOCs should also try and reach them via various comms channels (most admit that they do not see/hear/pay attention to announcements/ notifications). Text messages directly to their mobile phone, email and Twitter messages were frequently mentioned as well as suggestion of updating maps on board of train with stickers about engineering work "...like on the Tube"
- They want comms materials to be obvious/unmissable
- They expect to be told:

*'Why can't they text me?  
They have my mobile number!'*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dates/times</li><li>• Reasons</li><li>• Best alternatives</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the level of severity (no trains at all/ trains every 2h, etc.)</li><li>• How much time will be added to their journey because of disruptions</li><li>• When service is likely to be back to normal</li></ul> |
|---|---|

- Communication timings:
  - Most want to know at least 3-4 days in advance, ideally more
  - Although this timeline should be adjusted based on the length and seriousness of the disruption

# Passenger opinions of SWT

The good record on disruptions aside, views of SWT are largely negative; a key reason for this is the considerably greater proportion of commuters interviewed (compared to leisure/business travellers) who usually do not have a very positive journey

Main connotations with SWT are:

- ✗ Overcrowding
- ✗ Unreliable
- ✗ Very slow
- ✗ Issues with temperature in the carriages
- ✗ Signal failures
- ✗ The way delays are communicated instils distrust

What SWT could do better:

- ✓ More carriages, early morning in particular to reduce number of people standing for long time (which will come with the Waterloo upgrade)
- ✓ Better communication of delays – explain why, how much it will add to the journey and what the alternatives are (where they exist)
- ✓ Staff to be better informed and as helpful and genuine as possible

*'Travelling on South West Trains feels like cattle class.'*

*'Their service is like a snail.'*

**SOUTH WEST TRAINS**

*'They don't sound very honest when they communicate delays... You feel you cannot trust them.'*

**The unprompted mention of more carriages so early in the discussion highlights the importance of making them a key benefit message in the Waterloo upgrade**

**Changing the way delays are communicated, would be a relatively quick fix for improving passengers', and particularly commuters', opinions of SWT**

# Train journey associations

Some of the features of a good train journey link directly to the benefits of the Waterloo Upgrade. This suggests that the current comms plan focusing on these benefits is a good way of securing buy-in from customers

## Good train journey

- Punctuality
- Comfort
- Having a seat
- Refreshment trolley
- Nice messages on board and at stations



*'Allows you to get in a zone for what you are about to do.'*

## Bad train journey

- Standing
- Delays
- No or unhelpful communication when something goes wrong
- Overcrowding



*'Sets you up for a bad day.'*

*'Announcements which tell us we are stuck rather than how long it will take to resolve the situation – they are so annoying.'*

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# Awareness of upgrade & reaction

## Awareness of upgrade is low

- Low awareness so far
  - Only 4 out of 26 passengers had heard about the upgrade (sources: 2x through leaflets, just seemed to be in 'right place, right time', 2x through word of mouth)

## Initial reaction:

### ❖ Positive but concerned

- Those who have heard about the Waterloo Upgrade works were please about the advance notice but concerned about the impact on their travel

#### **Positive:**

Passengers are generally positive about what's being done, and happy that it will only take three weeks to do so

Planned disruption is acceptable if this improves the service

#### **Concerns:**

Some are concerned that the works will overrun and potentially an expectation that the entire upgrade programme will be completed within three weeks, rather than in the period 2017-2020

### ❖ Want to know more

- Dates
- What 'disruption' actually means – fewer trains? How many fewer?
- How much extra time should they allow for their journeys?
- What stations will be impacted?
- What this means for stations in the suburbs in the future – trains stopping more often/at more stations? People from further down the line want fewer stops
- Whether work is on schedule/how it is progressing?
- What are the alternatives?



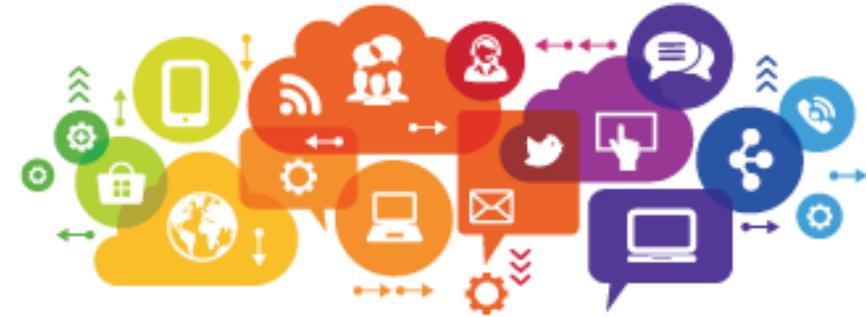
SWT need to manage expectations about what will be achieved in August 2017 and which benefits will only come into effect at the end of the upgrade programme. They also need to manage concerns by sharing information on the works being done and the progress

# Where and how would travellers expect to see the upgrade communicated?

*'Overcommunicate!'*

- ✓ **Target everyone, and commuters** in particular since they are the main customer segment
- ✓ It is a major project and as such communications should use **all possible channels**; apart from standard channels, participants also mentioned
  - ✓ Ticket purchase: messages when topping up oyster/ buying tickets at a ticket machine/ticket office (particularly to those buying season tickets)
  - ✓ Media used by commuters, e.g. Metro, ES, BBC website, TfL website, etc.
- ✓ Make **messages** on tannoy system **attention grabbing and varied** e.g. 'Did you know...' and played on a loop e.g. every half an hour
- ✓ It needs to **stand out from the standard disruption communication** – customers want it in their faces
- ✓ Messages should be **honest/bold**

The current comms plan fits well with customer expectations, but it needs to be 'in your face' and could make further use of media channels that target commuters in particular



*'The more channels the better.'*

- ✓ Comms activities should **start early** (main phase from January) and should be **repeated often** to remind passengers about upcoming disruptions; this fits with the current communication plan
  - This should allow passengers to plan holidays during that period
- ✓ Many passengers are Oyster users and receive and like the targeted alerts TfL sends on a particular route; they aspire to get something similar for their SWT service either from TfL or SWT (there was low awareness that they could sign up for SWT alerts)

# Main message passengers would focus on

**Before having seen any creatives, passengers agreed that SWT should focus messages around benefits – why the works are being done and how they will affect travellers (with focus on train services rather than stations)**

**This is a different reaction to what was seen when testing the Bath comms materials, where passengers were only interested in the impact of the disruption on their own journeys, rather than the longer term benefits**

## **Once exposed to creatives:**

- Passengers felt messaging needs to be targeted/personalised – how is it going to affect my station, my journey, etc.
- Be clear on what is exactly happening and where
- There has to be strong call to action – making you go to look for further information
- Highlight that people can still travel but just need to plan their route/alternatives
- Provide more information on alternatives
- Highlight that SWT/NR are working around the clock to do these works and to reduce impact on those travelling on affected lines
- Passengers also want to know what happens if works overrun

**This confirms that the benefit messages need to be prominent on all comms materials. Passengers would want the messages to be honest, bold, upfront, specific and simple**



The benefit messages that resonated the most with customers (in particular commuters) were:

- ✓ Brand new trains with lots of space
- ✓ More space and better facilities
- ✓ More frequent trains for everyone
- ✓ More comfortable journeys
- ✓ Longer trains with more space

Two of the Waterloo specific messages were perceived as positive in so far as they lead to more comfortable journeys with more space:

- Opening new platforms at Waterloo
- Extending the platforms at Waterloo

Messages about the concourse are of less interest to passengers, particularly commuters who spend as little time at the station as possible:

- ✗ Expanding the concourse at London Waterloo
- ✗ More space and nice places (at Waterloo)



# Reaction to creatives – blue background

## Likes:

- Background colour was generally preferred to grey – it stands out more
  - Although for some it was creating association with a cruise, not trains, and that potentially could lead to dismissal
- The way the information was communicated – it was felt to be more direct, more honest
- Main image was seen as more relevant
- Advance notice banner (top left – but see below under ‘improvement’)

*‘The use of graphics is spot on.’*

## Dislikes & improvements:

- Colour (though generally it was preferred to the grey) because it is similar to SWT colour it was felt that it might not stand out enough
- Text about improvement (bottom right) was considered too small
- The text talking about the benefits needs to be as big as the main text notifying the disruption
- Red advance notice banner (top left) needs to be bigger
- The text for Waterloo station upgrade needs to be stronger/bigger, so this can be linked to the works at Waterloo
- There was a preference for the direct message of ‘no services’, rather than the softer wording of ‘improvements mean no services’



# Posters – required information

Passengers would like to see detailed information on how the works will affect them. In particular, they would like information on:

- ❑ Exact dates/timings of the disruption
- ❑ What stations will be impacted
- ❑ Station specific information (as not all stations will be impacted in the same way)
- ❑ How many platforms will be impacted and whether this will be through out the whole period/ all the time or just during peak/off-peak hours
- ❑ What are the timetables changes
- ❑ How much time do passengers need to add to their journeys – more important for those 'down the line'
- ❑ What are alternative options, will there be replacement buses?
- ❑ What happens late in the evening? (assume work will happen around the clock)

*'It's telling you it's going to happen but it is not giving you the detail.'*

*'I don't really care what you're doing, I just want to know what will happen. How is it going to affect my routine?'*

**To ensure buy-in from customers, more detailed information on how the upgrade works will affect their journeys needs to be communicated and easily accessible**

# Reaction to creatives – orange leaflet (inside pages)

## Please plan ahead

From 5 to 28 August there will be no trains calling at the following stations:

- Chessington South
- Chessington North
- Earlsfield
- Malden Manor
- Norbiton
- Tolworth
- Queenstown Road

Rail replacement buses will be provided and will operate between these stations.



If you must travel during this time, please leave extra time for your journey and travel by rail replacement bus or by using alternative nearby stations.

### You may also wish to consider:

- Travelling earlier or later than normal to avoid the busiest times of the day. The busiest times to travel are between 8am and 9am and between 5pm and 6pm.
- Travelling from a different station or via an alternative route. You can find information on alternative routes on the Network Rail and South West Trains websites.

## Likes:

- That it lists stations
- Colour – stands out
- Generally provides more detailed information, e.g. mention of rail replacement buses which provides an alternative to travellers – it gives some reassurance that there are options

*'Of course I must travel; I have to get to work!'*

## Dislikes & improvements:

- Dislike the wording of sentence 'If you must travel during these times...'
- Lists the stations but actually does not say if there will be no trains between certain stations
- Discrepancy about service to and from Earlsfield – leaflet states it will be closed, website states it will be open during off-peak times; this causes confusion
- There is some need for further clarity on the following:
  - how replacement buses and other alternatives will work (either more explanation needed or saying that more info will be on website or similar)
  - the impact on services for rest of the line – in particular state that the service for rest of line will work
  - how much longer it will take
  - where to get more information (although this is on the back page but would also be relevant on the inside pages).
- Include link to the website, QR code, free phone number

# Reaction to creatives – website and email



## Likes:

- Feedback generally positive, but e-mail was perceived better in terms of design and the link to Waterloo – bigger and more iconic image; it stands out better
- The website is generic but informative. Search by station was very much liked, felt a bit more targeted/personalised

## Dislike & improvements:

- Both email and website were felt to be too focused on Waterloo, not on service improvements and what it means to passengers
- It would be useful to get information of where passengers need to go when platforms are closed/ which end of the station and what alternative routes they could take (which might be coming)
- There is a desire to see specific local benefits on the website along with disruption details for each station

## Note:

- Website needs to be mobile friendly (if it isn't already)
- There was one mention about the GIF image in the email which could cause some email clients (e.g. Outlook, Gmail) to categorise it as junk or spam

# General comments about / improvements for campaign material



## Generally everyone understood what is going to happen at Waterloo

Target audience: there should be a greater focus on commuters who will be most affected (a particularly strong view by the youngest group of commuters)

### Message:

- ✓ Include a call to action – go to X website to find out more or to find alternative routes
  - ✓ A URL is preferred to the current search term or make it at least a more memorable term
- ✓ Put a greater focus on options for passengers, explain what they are
- ✓ For commuters in particular there is too much focus on Waterloo when they use the station very little (other than to catch their train)

### Information:

- ✓ Ensure rail replacement/alternative routes information is shared and easily accessible
- ✓ Provide more info on what the situation will be like late in the evenings/ at weekends for those working then
- ✓ More detail on where to go at stations (Waterloo in particular) when platforms are closed and where to catch trains and rail replacement buses from

Timings: work with the exact dates of the upgrade (5<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> Aug), not August generally, let alone Summer (2017) or 2017-2020 (which makes it sound too long)

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# Most important points for SWT to take away – use all possible channels and be honest about it

*'Honesty, upfront communications.'*

*'Maximise all communication channels.'*

*'Cover all communication means.'*

*'Overadvertising!'*

*'Stick with the bold colours or people will just go straight past.'*

*'Leave no room for surprises, just overadvertise.'*

*'Maximise the coverage, anywhere and everywhere.'*

*'Just make sure the message is really clear...because it's really clear on the website, exactly what you need to do so maybe just a bit more information on the posters or where to look on the website could be a bit bigger.'*

*'Don't bother with the concourse, focus on the trains.'*

*'Ensure they've got everything covered, so every possible issue or thing that could happen'*

*'Focus on the commuters...that's their biggest customer [group].'*

*'I feel like it's all [communications] focused on the concourse and I'm not really bothered.'*

*'Understand the age we're in...too much text... we just don't have time.'*



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# Summary and conclusions

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Passengers express frustration with the way planned disruption is currently communicated; if this can be improved for major projects such as the Waterloo upgrade it has the potential to enhance perceptions of the TOC

2

Passengers are open to hearing about the benefits of the Waterloo upgrade (unlike previous research for Bath Spa). Understanding the benefits of the upgrade makes passengers more accepting of the disruption and it is important that communications refer to these. However, the benefits need to be clearly seen as being in the passengers' interests – 'What's in it for me?'

3

Thus far, awareness of the Waterloo upgrade project is low. Passengers are happy with plans to provide more information in the New Year. They expect communications to utilise all possible channels and believe that as August approaches the message has to be 'in their face'

4

Overall the creative material is positively received although some changes are required - the images on the grey creatives (seen as irrelevant); balance between disruption and benefits on the blue creatives; further details/clarity on the orange leaflet

5

The station-specific information on the web-site is well received although it focusses on the disruption rather than listing local benefits. As communications ramp up, passengers want detailed timetable information (for trains and buses), details of bus stops/routes, other alternatives, revised platform numbers at Waterloo, etc.

6

The key point for SWT and NR to take away from this initial research is the need to be absolutely honest in all communications and to use all possible channels

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