



Putting passengers at the heart of engineering works

How to effectively communicate with and support passengers during the planning and execution of engineering works

Investment in the rail network is welcome and much-needed, resulting in a better service for passengers. While there is never a good time to carry out engineering works, good communication and management of the situation can significantly reduce the negative impact on passengers.

Using our research*, we have made a number of recommendations to the industry about the management of disruption and how best to communicate this to passengers.

Recommendations

- The revised timetable must be available 12 weeks before, including times of bus/coach replacement services.
- Advance tickets should go on sale 12 weeks in advance or sooner.
- Ensure there are plenty of staff present to help passengers at interchange stations and bus boarding points.
- Monitor crowd control measures to make sure they are necessary and are working well.
- If there is any unforeseen disruption, give passengers a clear, honest explanation.

Tailoring communication is key

Consider the content, type, tone and timing of information that different passengers require.

- Who does the work affect and how?
- Tell passengers what they need to know, when they need to know it.
- Adopt an appropriate tone of voice and acknowledge that it is disrupting passengers' journeys.
- Use a full range of channels to get the message out there.

Tell people:

- what is being done – and in some cases, why it is being done in this way
- how they will benefit
- when they will see the full benefits.

Communicate using a mixture of:

- banners and posters at stations
- leaflets handed out at stations
- window stickers
- live audio announcements (research indicates this is preferred to pre-recorded announcements)
- social media.

There is a hierarchy to passengers' communication needs

There will be disruption ... at this station ... on this route ... on these dates ...

This will be the impact on your journey ... and these are the alternative arrangements ...

This is what the work involves ... and ... this will be the ultimate benefit for you.

Going beyond the minimum

Our research shows that passengers feel they deserve compensation for disruption caused by planned engineering work. This is especially true when they receive an inferior service, such as needing to use a different station or catch a replacement bus.

Monetary compensation, or a gesture such as providing free coffee or ice cream, can assure passengers that you are aware of the negative impact on their journey and additional stress this may have caused. Where possible, and while still meeting the needs of disabled passengers, use coaches instead of buses.



Summary

Our work at Reading, Bath Spa and London Waterloo demonstrated the benefits of using passenger research to test communications material, track awareness of works/disruption, monitor the effectiveness of communications and to pick up on unmet communications needs. We recommend that when planning a major engineering project, budget is made available for passenger research to ensure user needs are at the forefront of communication planning and delivery. Ultimately, the work is for passengers.

Don't forget, passengers say: 'provide me with clear information about how my journey will be affected (including level of impact, alternative travel arrangements and timetables) and support me as I undertake my disrupted and potentially unfamiliar journey'.

* The recommendations draw on our research monitoring the effectiveness of different communication activities used to build awareness of engineering works at Reading, Bath Spa and London Waterloo. During the engineering works at London Waterloo we were able to speak to passengers through a number of short surveys using our Transport User Panel. We also deployed staff at key stations during peak periods and monitored social media to see how well the disruption management plans were working for passengers.