



# Impact of strikes on Northern passengers and their views on the dispute

## Transport User Panel Survey

October 2018

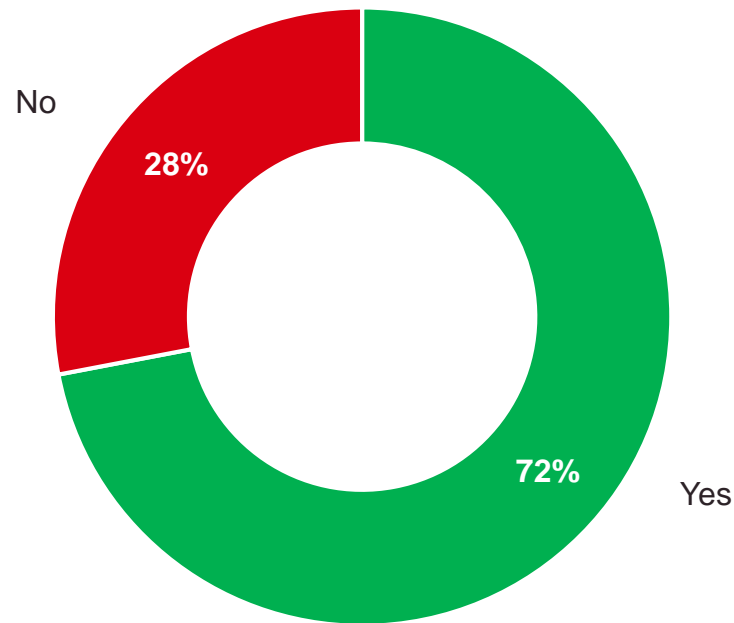
## Introduction and background

- On consecutive Saturdays since 25 August members of the National Union of Rail Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) working at Northern have been taking strike action. We approached our Transport User Panel to ask Northern passengers about the impact of the strikes and their understanding and perceptions of the dispute.
- On Friday 5 October we emailed a questionnaire to 865 passengers on the Transport User Panel who had previously told us that they use Northern trains. We closed the survey on Monday 15 October. The findings in this report are based upon 361 online interviews which were completed within the fieldwork period.
- Data is unweighted and while findings indicate what public opinion about the strike is likely to be, they should not be seen as being statistically representative of Northern passengers more generally. Transport User Panellists tend to be more aware of transport issues than the wider general public.

## Seven in ten passengers have been affected by the strike action

Around seven in ten passengers who responded to our survey say that they have been affected by the recent strikes in some way. Some told us that they had to change their plans and travel by other means or by different routes, while others had to abandon travel plans altogether.

*Have you been affected in any way by the strikes which have been taking place on each Saturday since the 25<sup>th</sup> August?*



Base: Panellists using Northern train services (361)

## The strike action is impacting passengers and damaging confidence in travel with Northern

When asked about the impact of the strike passengers indicate a high degree of frustration. For many, journeys that they had planned to take, could not be made at all. While for others, getting to places at the weekend has been, or will be, a real struggle.

*"[The strike has] killed any social travel to Manchester or Liverpool. Between the strikes on a Saturday and "planned Sunday cancellations", that are only planned around 7pm on a Friday, there is no train travel on a weekend. Even on strike days there are still more cancellations than advertised. It's a lottery to get there and a joke to get home."*  
Commuter, from Earlstown to Manchester Picadilly

*"I have tickets to the Super League Grand Final at Old Trafford on Sat 13th October travelling from Furness Vale with no access to a car. I'm therefore going to be put to additional expense by there being no return train or alternative provision. Likely requires use of a different operator to Stockport and then an hourly bus. It is fortunate I know the area and alternative otherwise [I would be] completely stranded."*  
Leisure traveller, from Furness Vale to Manchester Piccadilly

Aside from the general frustration of not being able to travel, or not being able to travel without difficulty, the strikes have arguably had more serious implications for those who are required to work at the weekend. The strike action is likely to have some longer-term consequences too. Some passengers indicate that the strike action has severely affected their confidence in the train company.

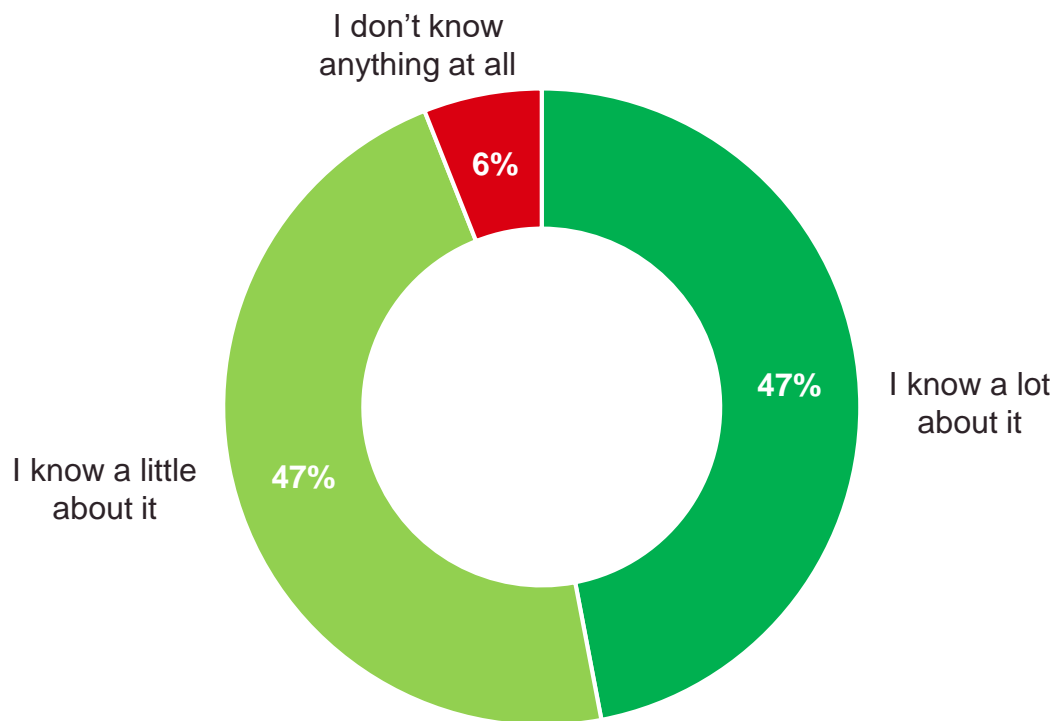
*"Unable to travel for work. I have to finish work early as there is no late service home. I am impacted financially by this."*  
Commuter, from Leeds to Skipton

*"I no longer have any confidence in the Northern network. I have only used the train three times since May and feel trapped in my home because I have not been able to get out and about as I would have done. I feel really depressed about the rail services and am not sure whether I will ever return to routinely travelling by Northern trains."*  
Leisure traveller, from St Annes-on-Sea to Manchester Victoria

## The overwhelming majority of passengers say they know about the reasons for the dispute

Passengers who use Northern trains responding to this survey indicate that they feel they have a relatively high degree of awareness as to the reasons for the strikes. These passengers, who have actively opted in to receiving surveys from Transport Focus, are likely to be more aware than the those who use Northern more generally about the strikes and the reasons for it.

*How much would you say that you know about the reasons for the disagreement between the trade unions and Northern?*



Base: Panellists using Northern train services (361)

## Passengers' perceptions of the reasons for the dispute

When asked, the majority of passengers understand that the reason for the dispute concerns the staff on-board and their roles. Some think the dispute is about whether a member of staff, other than the driver, is present on the train at all. Others think there would still be a second member of staff on the train and that the dispute is focused on who is responsible for operating the train doors.

*"The Department for Transport have mandated that a percentage of Northern services must be driver-only operated and the RMT believe that will make trains less safe."*

*"Disagreement between staff wanting a guard/ticket inspector on trains to shut the doors and the company thinking that the train drivers can drive the train and check the doors."*

*"Northern want to introduce driver only trains, RMT don't agree with it."*

*"My understanding is that Northern Rail want to get rid of all the ticket officers on their trains so they can cut costs. Their employees are striking in protest."*

*"Whether drivers or guards open train doors."*

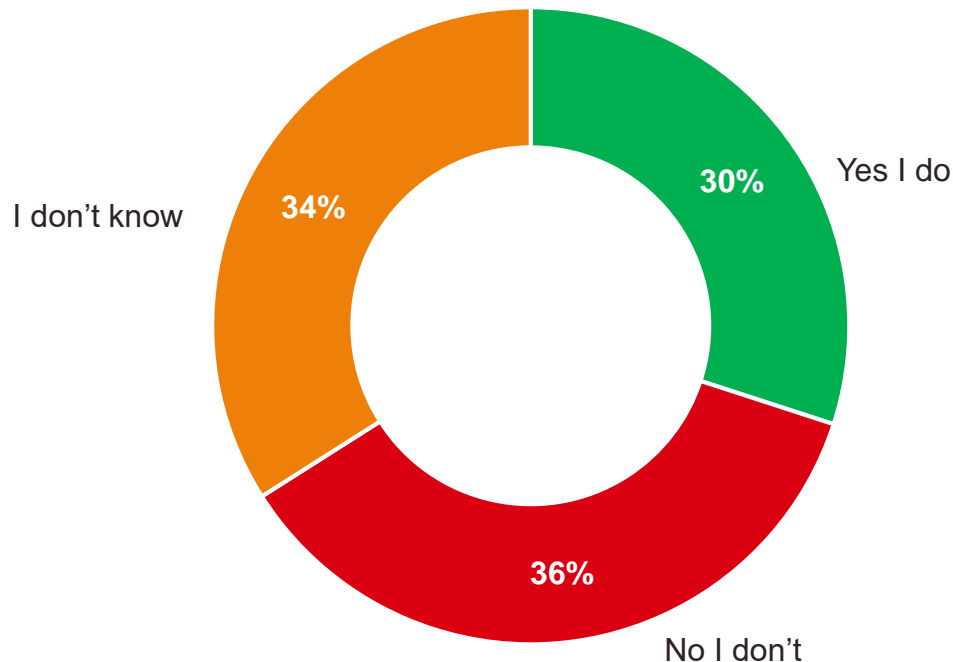
*"Northern want to get rid of the onboard train manager (conductor) and move to driver only operated (DOO) trains. I feel that this move is bad as I would prefer to see a person onboard the train, whom you could go to in an emergency."*

*"One man operation of driver only trains. It's a bit confused as to what is going on with Northern saying they will keep staff and the RMT saying they won't."*

## Passengers are split as to whether they think that their journeys will be different after any resolution of the dispute

In terms of the changes passengers may see in future if and when the dispute is resolved, 36 percent of passengers say that they think that their journeys will not be affected in any way, while 30 percent disagree. The eventual outcome of the dispute is currently unclear, so it is understandable that 34 percent say that they don't know if their journey will be affected.

*If and when this dispute is resolved, do you think your journey will be different in any way?*



Base: Panellists using Northern train services (361)

## Some passengers are confident their journeys will be unaffected whatever the outcome of the dispute

Among those who think that this resolution will make no difference to their journey, some report that they do not see guards on the trains, with overcrowding sometimes cited as a reason. Other passengers, saying their journeys won't be affected, seem confident any changes won't affect their local line.

*"To be honest, Northern are so shocking and the trains are that packed that you rarely see a guard because they can't get down the train."*

*"I seldom see guards on trains as they are so overcrowded that they can't do anything other than open & close the doors."*

*"Northern won't be able to replace guards on Cumbrian coast line."*

*"There will still be a second member of staff on most trains I travel with a season ticket so don't require to buy a ticket and it doesn't affect passengers which member of staff opens the doors."*

*"The train will still run, the tickets will still be collected and the doors will be opened. Guards are often not around when needed anyway."*

*"As often the guard is not seen on the train anyway. Travelling from Furness Vale to Manchester is a prime example of this with no ticket buying facilities at Furness Vale but often the guard not coming to collect fares resulting in a long queue to leave Piccadilly station. Has been a long time frustration of mine."*

*"Because the chance of driver only trains being introduced on the Buxton line is nil."*



## Some passengers think journeys may improve if drivers control the doors and on-board staff have more time to help passengers

Some believe that for reasons of improved journey times and better customer service, the move towards trains where the driver is responsible for the operation of the doors marks an improvement.

*“Journey times should improve because passengers will be able to get on and off trains faster with driver-operated doors. The on-board staff will have more time to assist passengers, check tickets and collect unpaid fares.”*

*“I don’t think the guard contributes greatly to the running of my train. The only change may be that I won’t have to wait for them to get from one end of the train to another just to open the doors, which actually might make the trains more punctual.”*

*“The train should run just as well with the driver operating the doors. This should leave the second man free to interface with the passengers.”*

*“Train will not stop at station and have to wait for conductor to get to the doors to open them reducing dwell times at stations conductor will be protecting revenue by making sure everyone has paid for their journey win win.”*

*“One way journeys could be different is that hopefully guards might be more visible to passengers and get more involved in ticket checking and sales.”*

*“Reduced hold ups as guards struggle on over crowded trains to open the doors are stations.”*

## Many passengers express concern about their personal safety if there were no second member of staff on the train in future

Many passengers are strongly opposed to any changes. For many of these passengers issues of safety and anti-social behaviour, particularly late at night, are a key concern.

*"If at some point Northern trains do become driver-only operated, I will avoid travelling alone late at night (as a transgender person, I'm concerned about harassment and violence based on previous experience, and wouldn't feel safe without a guard to oversee a situation in a train carriage)."*

*"I would prefer to travel on a train with a guard. Saturdays often there are drunk potentially violent passengers. We need a guard to raise the alarm and call BTP. Also, if there are no guards there will be fare dodgers. Many guards are very friendly and I would miss this."*

*"I think guards on trains are essential for the security and safety of travellers."*

*"Older people, women travelling alone & other vulnerable people will feel less safe if the new initiatives are implemented."*

*"If the train company has their way and conductors are dispensed with, I feel that there could be trouble from those who misbehave on trains."*

*"If the train company forces a no-guard scenario then my journey will be affected. I really do not want to travel in a train without a guard... I fear that trains without guards have potential to be unpleasant places."*

*"Late night trains can be rowdy, I would hesitate to travel late night if no staff on the train."*

*"I have never favoured strike action before, but in this instance I wholeheartedly agree with the unions. Why won't the DfT listen to rail users, who pay dearly for their journeys, and who want the reassurance that there is someone on board who will oversee their welfare."*

## Other passengers are concerned about how passengers who require assistance will be able to get on and off the train

Along with personal safety the other main concern raised by passengers are related to passengers who may require assistance to get on and off the train and the availability of staff to provide this assistance

*"If there are fewer conductors on the train I can only think it would have a negative impact on the service. How would passengers ask someone a query/or request help if needed? Who would deal with passengers requiring mobility assistance?"*

*"The guards are helpful and an important part of the journey. Help travellers, provide information, sell tickets. They help disabled people to get on and off the trains so who would do that job without them? Northern hasn't got a good track record and the strikes are a real pain."*

*"I like using the train and because of vision issues I have to use public transport at night. To enable me to access trains in the dark it is essential I have the aid of a guard. If there are no guards I will have to use other forms of transport."*

*"If it's driver only then I can no longer rely on the brilliant guards to point me in the right direction once I leave the train. Also my mum is blind so her confidence will go I fear."*

*"The removal of guards from the trains will make it extremely difficult for disabled passengers to travel on these services."*

*"My main concern is access for wheelchairs and mobility scooters and other people with disabilities."*

## Passengers are frustrated the dispute is dragging on and indicate their trust in rail travel is being impacted

Some think it has not been made clear what changes Northern may want to make in future and that the current situation needs to be explained more clearly. Others just look forward to a resolution of any kind, while more indicate that the dispute has negatively impacted on their trust in all of the parties involved.

*"I do not think the travelling public are being fully informed of what Northern wish to achieve. As I understand it other operators have reached deals - why not Northern?"*

*"There is no sign of a resolution and both Northern and the RMT seem happy to let the strikes drift on. The situation should be brought to a head. Nine weeks of Saturday strikes is totally unacceptable."*

*"I will try to avoid Northern Rail in so far as is reasonably possible. I blame the union for this dispute but I still want Northern to be immediately stripped of their franchise. The RMT are a blight on this industry and Northern Rail are grossly incompetent and not fit for purpose."*

*"There is no sign of a resolution and both Northern and the RMT seem happy to let the strikes drift on. The situation should be brought to a head. Nine weeks of Saturday strikes is totally unacceptable."*

*"Arriva Northern seem incapable of operating a train service and I have no confidence in them at all to be able to maintain an fully functioning seamless rail service."*

*"Because even when there are no strikes going ahead there are still delays, cancelled trains and trains that turn up with a woefully inadequate number of carriages to fit all of the passengers on. yet the cost continues to rise."*