Learning from context with Artificial intelligence (AI)

Keith Bailey, Senior insight advisor

November 2019

transportfocus

About Transport Focus

Transport Focus is the independent transport user watchdog

- We represent the interests of rail passengers in Great Britain; bus, coach and tram users across England (outside London); and users of England's motorways and major 'A' roads (the Strategic Road Network)

Every year we conduct around 60,000 interviews with passengers in the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS)

- It's the national benchmark survey for the whole rail industry
- BUT we also ask people to tell us their stories through open-ended free text responses, asking them: *do you have any further comments about your trip today or the rail service generally?*
- This is an **underutilised resource** – over four waves there are over 50,000 open ended comments. It's hard to read and understand this volume

transportfocus

Learning from context

Conscious of developments in AI – Artificial Intelligence – we were keen to see whether AI might unlock hidden treasures
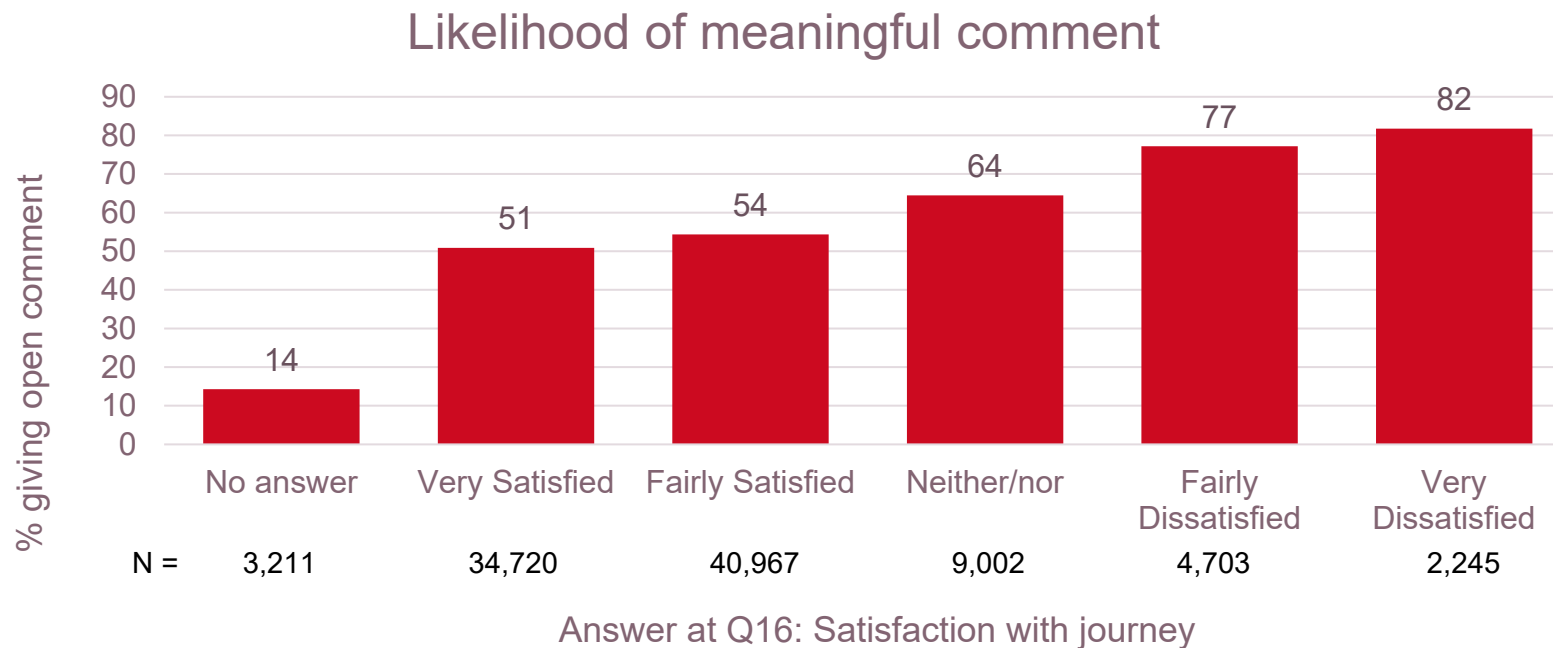
- We decided to deploy Signoi – an **Artificial Intelligence** (AI) driven pattern recognition platform – to identify themes and insights that we could all learn from, and make this accessible at Train Operating Company (TOC) level

- The way to think about this is 'qualitative research, at scale'. A resource that can be mined for new insight, ongoing

- These comments represent something different from the more structured ratings system – they reflect the broader contextual things that are on rail passengers' minds…

<div style="background-color:red; color:white; text-align:center;">This report is just a taster…</div>

transportfocus

What do these comments represent?

The comments are **not entirely representative** or balanced: people with negative experiences are more likely to add a comment. However, this is important because it **helps us learn the 'why'**. Hence – qualitative, but at scale

People tend to use the opened ended question to either reinforce points made, or highlight contextual issues

Likelihood of meaningful comment

| N = | 3,211 | 34,720 | 40,967 | 9,002 | 4,703 | 2,245 |

Answer at Q16: Satisfaction with journey

Total comments 51,674 across last four waves

What does Signoi enable us to do?

New generation AI platform to derive meaning and themes from unstructured open text data

Signal from Noise

Accelerated reading; fast, rigorous decoding of messy data revealing: meanings, emotional energies, attitudes and feelings; complex energy rather than base sentiment; meaning rather than simple coding
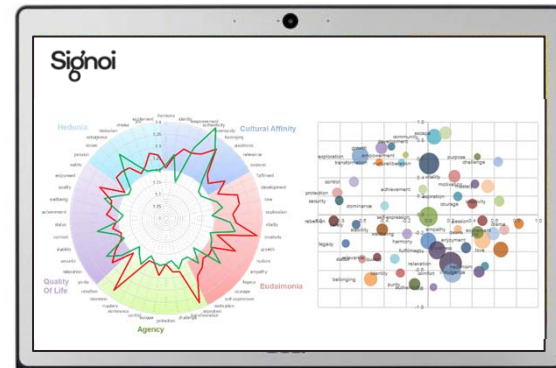
Revelation, not search

Surfacing naturally emerging patterns and themes using neural nets, machine learning models, and advanced analytics. Shows what is there rather than just finding things you need to tell it to look for

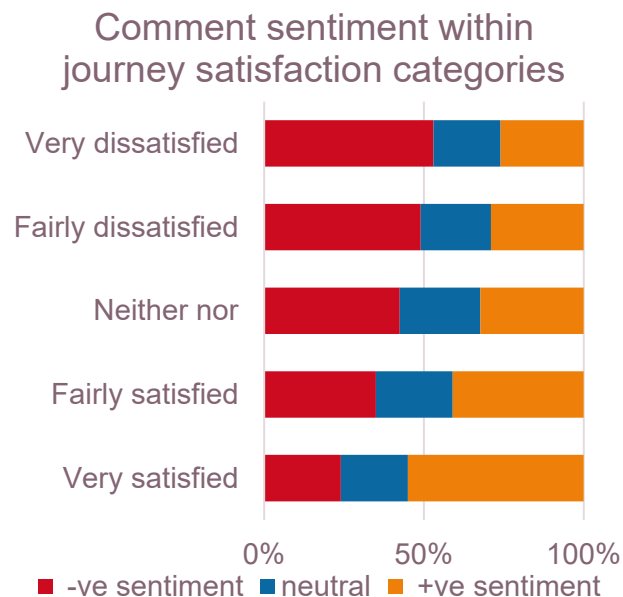### Storytelling & interrogation

Cutting analysis time and cost by removing a lot of the grunt work – allowing human minds to do more of what they're best at – thinking and interpretation
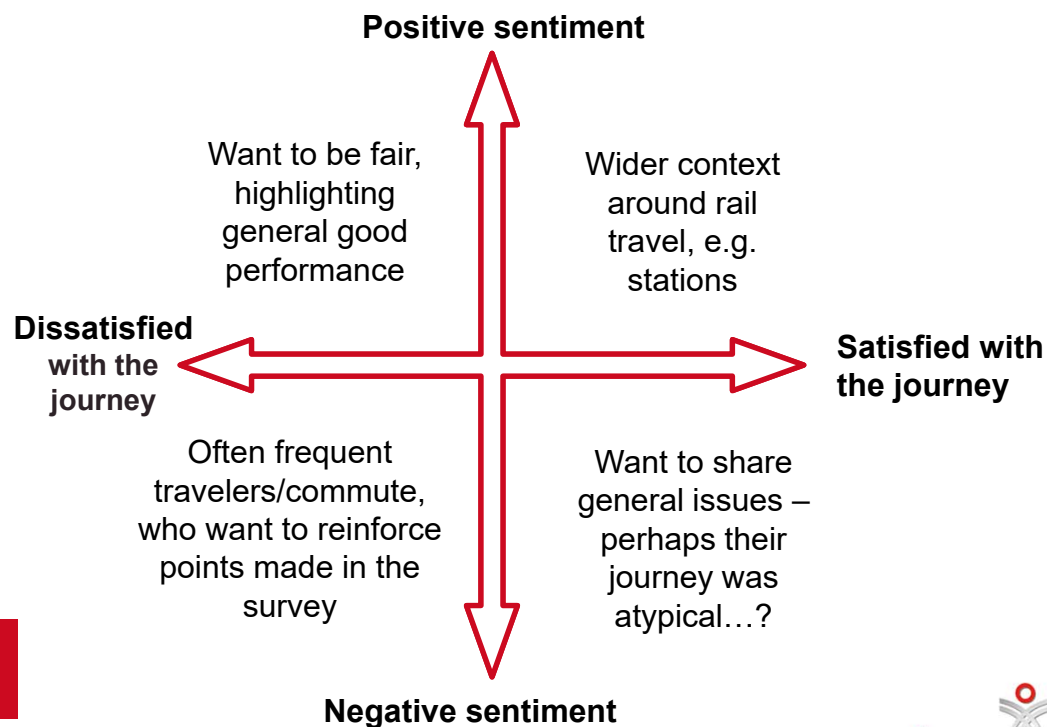
transportfocus

What kind of insight can be gained?

It's all about context. For example, satisfied travelers may still wish to highlight wider issues (e.g. safety). Signoi algorithms can pick up positive or negative sentiment in the comments, which is **not the same as journey satisfaction**

This can provide important learning for TOCs around issues beyond the specific journey being surveyed

Comment sentiment within journey satisfaction categories

Very dissatisfied	
Fairly dissatisfied	
Neither nor	
Fairly satisfied	
Very satisfied	

0%   50%   100%

■ -ve sentiment ■ neutral ■ +ve sentiment

Signoi measures whether a comment is broadly positive, negative, or neutral

Positive sentiment

Want to be fair, highlighting general good performance

Wider context around rail travel, e.g. stations

Dissatisfied with the journey ← → **Satisfied with the journey**

Often frequent travelers/commute, who want to reinforce points made in the survey

Want to share general issues – perhaps their journey was atypical…?

Negative sentiment

transportfocus

There are rich insights to be found…

Positive sentiment

Dissatisfied with the journey ← → **Satisfied with the journey**

Negative sentiment

"Generally a very good prompt service, on this day in particular, the service just did not meet customers' expectations. Delays and no information whatsoever"

"Generally the trains are reliable and good, but when a delay occurs (as today) there is very little information available about alternative trains so I can plan my route home, or even be able to give my family some idea of when to expect me"

"The staff on the ground tried to be helpful and did their best. The management and organisation of ScotRail, plus their inability to cope with poor weather of any type, is the issue for me"

"The train station is currently under new construction so my survey is based on the way the excellent staff attention to safety while there and how helpful they were to us as I do not use your service as only on a holiday. I would like to add that the oyster card was fantastic and so easy to use and excellent value for money. Well done from a happy traveller to a fab city and how easy the Tube systems made our access so great"

"We have used this route quite often; if we can we prefer to use Grand Central to travel as their trains are more comfortable and feel more spacious. So far the punctuality has been extremely good, the ticket inspectors very polite and helpful and the experience has been excellent"

"Trains unreliable, ancient stock. Crowded at weekends and peak times. Ticket machines often not working and ticket to Luton does not let me through barriers. No warm waiting facilities. No lifts or toilets, disaster. No staff out of hours for security and safety, bad area. I've missed trains because announcements console is incorrect. Old bangers of trains, too hot or too cold. Terrible WiFi and tickets way too expensive. Always miss connections at Finsbury. Why do the trains not go to London King's Cross anymore? Not disabled or child friendly trains or platform. You can never find staff to help, barrier staff look ****** off or bored all the time. Kept selling me tickets to Luton cheaper that didn't cover all zones. Also told me I could use contactless to get to Luton and I got fined 40 pounds! Don't grit the platforms or streets outside station in winter. It's a miserable, depressing station. Needs radical upgrade as very busy!"

"Today's journey was fine. However during peak time travel a.m. and p.m., most of the trains I have used daily in and out of Liverpool Central, have been three carriages and overcrowded to extent that I would say dangerous and in an accident situation a high number of injuries and possible fatalities"

"Today is Saturday so no problem, but I use the station during the week for the same journey and back again in rush hour. During the week Gunnersbury is very dangerous due to the serious overcrowding. It is made worse by the overground train heading East stopping halfway down the platform. You get many people rushing last minute down the steps and along an already overcrowded platform to catch the train, so it is a matter of time before..."
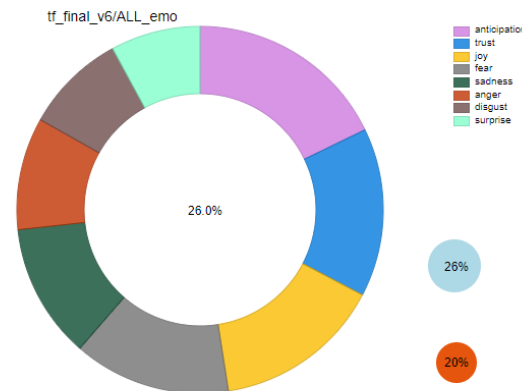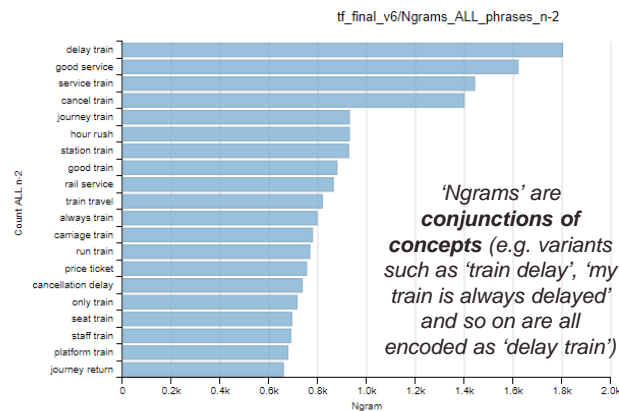
transportfocus

Implicit emotion and sentiment

Signoi identifies emotions in the **comments**, and highlights where the main positive and negative language lies

Disruption, break, delay, miss…

Dirty, awful, smell, appalling, rubbish…

Delay, cancel, fail, awful, complaining, rude…

Cancel, delay, awful, terrible, bad…

Delay, problem, difficult, vulnerable, unsafe, confused, late…

Journey, arrive, good, happy, on time…

Reliable, clean, helpful, pleasant, guard…

Excellent, happy, pleasant, great, good…

26.0%
The percentage of words used that have emotional content

anticipation
trust
joy
fear
sadness
anger
disgust
surprise

The percentage of words used that are positive, in context

26% Positive

The percentage of words used that are negative, in context

20% Negative

transportfocus

Key themes

At the first stage of analysis, Signoi delivers **accelerated reading** - surfacing the most frequently used words and combinations of words. You can then analyse these by any structured variable (e.g. TOC, journey purpose, traveler demographics)
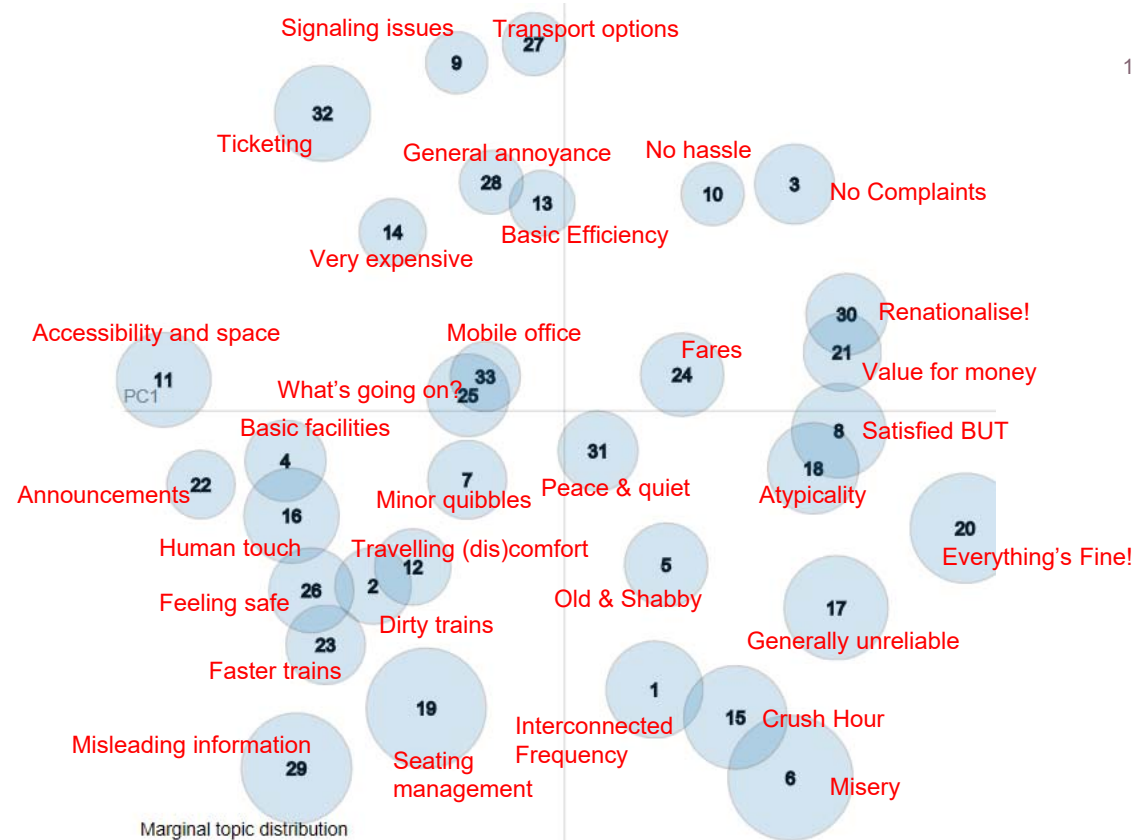

*'Ngrams' are **conjunctions of concepts** (e.g. variants such as 'train delay', 'my train is always delayed' and so on are all encoded as 'delay train')*

The Signoi emotions show a mixed picture from the comments, and highlight obvious recurring themes such as 'train delay', 'good service' and so on
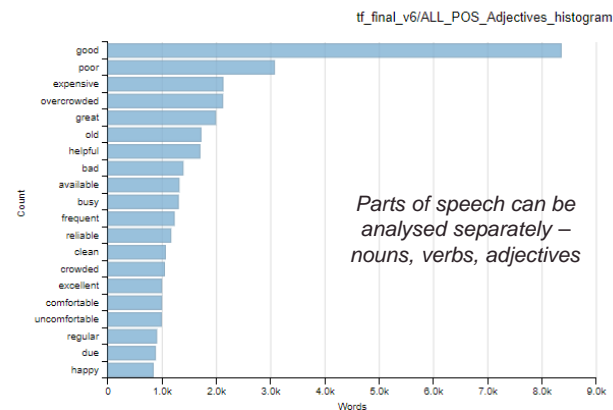
Parts of speech can be analysed separately – nouns, verbs, adjectives
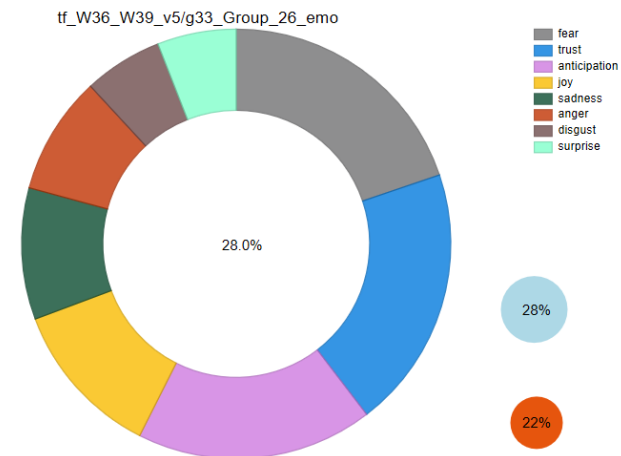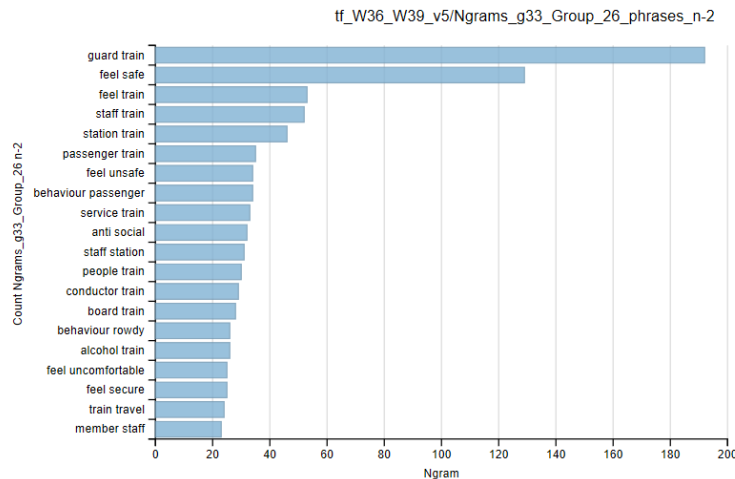
transportfocus

Key themes

Signoi then uses a form of **cluster analysis** to automatically identify and quantify themes. Human analysts then name the themes based on the nature of the comments

Topic Presence %

Theme	Value
6. Misery	8.8
20. Everything's fine	7.8
19. Seating management	7.2
1. Interconnected frequency	6.9
29. Misleading information	5.3
15. Crush hour	4.9
17. Generally unreliable	4.4
16. Human touch	4.1
11. Accessible space	3.9
8. Satisfied BUT	3.9
32. Ticketing	3.7
5. Old and shabby	3.2
31. Peace and quiet	2.9
4. Basic facilities	2.9
18. Atypicality	2.8
26. Feeling safe	2.6
12. Travelling discomfort	2.3
2. Dirty trains	2.1
24. Fares	2.1
3. No complaints	2.0
25. What's going on?	2.0
23. Faster trains	1.9
33. Mobile office	1.9
7. Minor quibbles	1.8
14. Very expensive	1.7
30. Renationalise!	1.5
21. Value for money	1.4
22. Announcements	1.1
10. No hassle	0.8
13. Basic efficiency	0.7
27. Transport options	0.6
9. Signalling issues	0.5
28. General annoyance	0.3

transportfocus

Key themes: example

Passengers highlight a range of issues relating to **feeling safe**

tf_W36_W39_v5/Ngrams_g33_Group_26_phrases_n-2

tf_W36_W39_v5/g33_Group_26_emo

Legend:
- fear
- trust
- anticipation
- joy
- sadness
- anger
- disgust
- surprise

28.0%
28%
22%

EXAMPLES

At times particularly late on the Wrexham - Chester train is very rowdy and quite intimidating. Also there has been drugs, particularly in the toilets at Wrexham station

I like the presence of a conductor on the train so that I feel less-threatened by anti-social passengers. I would also like to have a better lit, brighter pedestrian tunnel at Herne Hill station

Drunk passengers in the evening on trains leaving London, often make me feel uncomfortable - vulnerable

You need the guards. I have been on the train when the guards were needed with people drinking and causing trouble

If you get rid of train guards I will not travel by train in the future. They are wanted and needed!

I do occasionally experience rowdy behaviour on trains but more often late at night

I would feel safer if a guard was patrolling the trains

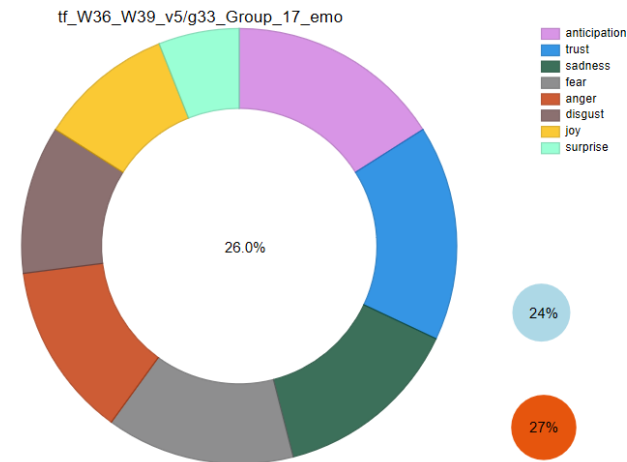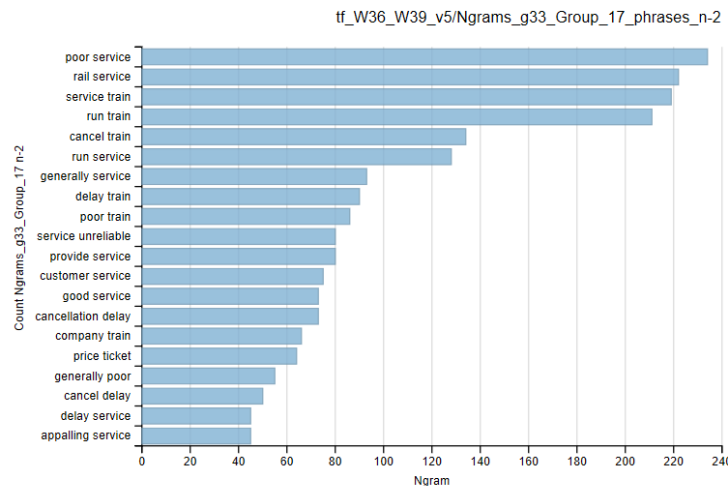I witness a lot of drug use on the train and it makes me feel very uncomfortable

I didn't feel safe on the train as no one comes up and down the train if you need help and support

I feel quite threatened when some passengers get on the train

transportfocus

Key themes: example

General unreliability is a strong driver of (lack of) trust

tf_W36_W39_v5/Ngrams_g33_Group_17_phrases_n-2

tf_W36_W39_v5/g33_Group_17_emo

- anticipation
- trust
- sadness
- fear
- anger
- disgust
- joy
- surprise

26.0%   24%   27%

EXAMPLES

Southern Rail provide a terrible service and the franchise should be awarded to a train company who can provide a decent service

The rail service is awful, commute regularly and cannot rely on the trains to be on time, terrible

Generally, trains running through Streatham are late or cancelled at very short notice. A very unreliable rail service

This train (the 16.44) isn't too bad, but the DRS operated trains have terrible reliability and are slower

Looking forward to Crossrail - hope its an improvement. Heathrow Connect frequently cancels services

The rail service is appalling and overpriced for the service received

Govia provide a terrible service, overpriced. I have changed how I live my life in order to get to work!

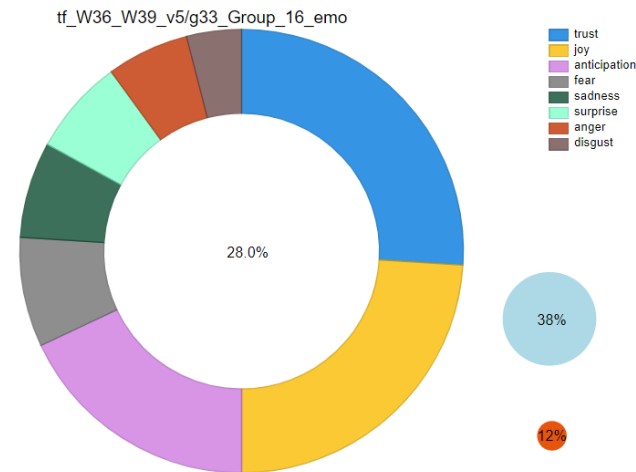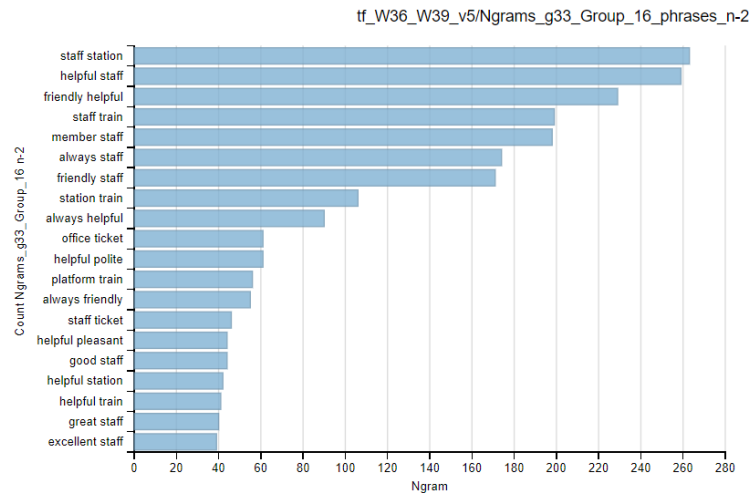West Croydon is fine. Southern trains are extremely unreliable though and the service is generally shambolic

Thameslink is poor and unreliable, constantly late and poor-quality trains

Arriva Trains is very unreliable and makes no compensation. Overpriced for such poor service

transportfocus

Key themes: example

The human touch is very important to passengers

tf_W36_W39_v5/Ngrams_g33_Group_16_phrases_n-2

tf_W36_W39_v5/g33_Group_16_emo

trust
joy
anticipation
fear
sadness
surprise
anger
disgust

28.0%

38%

12%

EXAMPLES

One of the staff at Sittingbourne helped another passenger with a young child on to the train and asked if she needed assistance at the other end. He was very helpful to her and it didn't go unnoticed

The staff on the train are always polite and friendly and very informative, always helpful

As a solo traveler I always appreciate being able to see a member of staff on the train

The lady member of staff at the station was extremely helpful and polite

Staff were extremely helpful and polite on the train and on the platform/station

Train and train station staff are always pleasant

Friendly staff at Beaconsfield station - always helpful and kind

Station staff very helpful especially two ladies on Clapham station

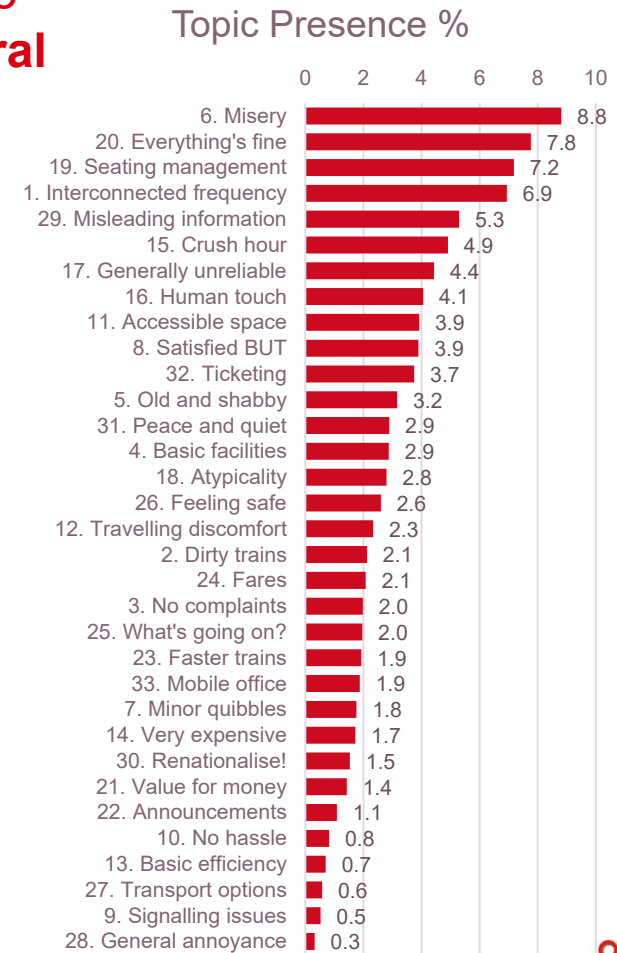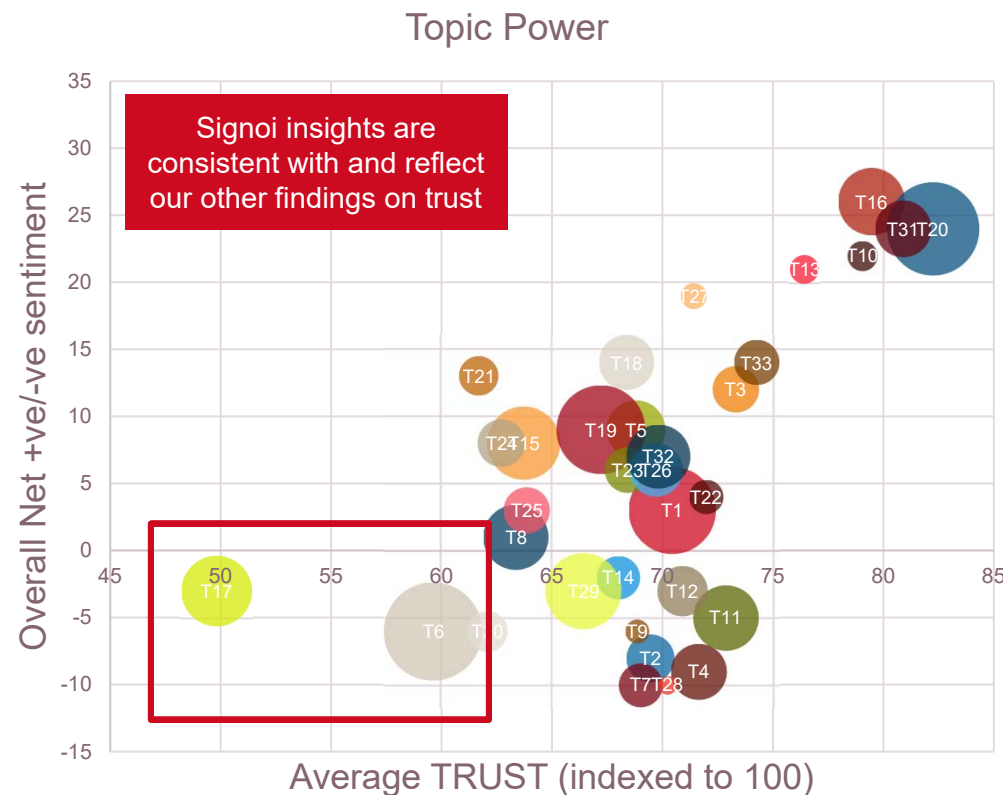transportfocus

Key themes: summary

TOPIC	IN A NUTSHELL
1. Interconnected frequency	Issues with short connection times or lack of frequent connections, delays have knock on effect
2. Dirty trains	Trains are not clean, sometimes smell, often old
3. No complaints	Literally, no complaints!
4. Basic facilities	On train and in station, availability of toilets, catering etc
5. Old and shabby	Rolling stock is tired, rickety, and uncomfortable
6. Misery	Debilitating delays and cancellations, often frequent
7. Minor quibbles	Minor issues that do not impact satisfaction
8. Satisfied BUT	Often contextualising against small delays
9. Signaling issues	Explicit mentions of signal problems, track trespass, etc
10. No hassle	Bland positive assessments
11. Accessible space	Complex topic containing accessibility in all its forms: luggage, buggies, bikes, car parking, even escalators
12. Traveling in discomfort	Uncomfortable train environment – seats, temperature, etc
13. Basic efficiency	Getting from A to B as advertised
14. Very expensive	Complaints about ticket prices
15. Crush hour	Stories of hellish rush hour journeys
16. Human touch	Mentions of staff (station & train) usually, not always, positive
17. Generally unreliable	Wider contextual comments about a route or an operator, beyond the specific journey

TOPIC	IN A NUTSHELL
18. Atypicality	Making point that while this journey may have been OK, it is generally worse
19. Seating management	Availability of seat bookings, and whether they are honoured on the train itself
20. Everything's fine	Positive comments about a pleasant journey
21. Value for money	Generally negative about value for money relative to service levels delivered
22. Announcements	Unclear/inaudible announcements (train/station)
23. Faster trains	General comments about slowness on some routes
24. Fares	Complexity and/or price of getting the right fare
25. What's going on?	Confusing or absent information (especially stations) when trains are delayed/cancelled
26. Feeling safe	Concerns about safety on board and at stations, rowdy passengers, need for guards often mentioned
27. Transport options	Lack of choice in how to get from A to B
28. General annoyance	A variety of irritations that do not sit well within other topics
29. Misleading information	A major cause of stress, especially at stations – wrong information about platforms, etc
30. Renationalise	Belief that TOCs need for profit undermines service
31. Peace and quiet	The need for quiet journeys – includes issues with noisy passengers, quiet zones, etc
32. Ticketing	Mainly about machines and lack of clarity about what ticket is valid on which route
33. Mobile office	Onboard WiFi, power, etc, mainly for businesspeople

transportfocus

Trust in TOCs

In many cases, these themes are strongly related to TRUST in TOCs – particularly perceptions of **general unreliability**, and **misery** in the rush hour

Topic Power

Signoi insights are consistent with and reflect our other findings on trust

Overall Net +ve/-ve sentiment

Average TRUST (indexed to 100)

Topic Presence %

Topic	%
6. Misery	8.8
20. Everything's fine	7.8
19. Seating management	7.2
1. Interconnected frequency	6.9
29. Misleading information	5.3
15. Crush hour	4.9
17. Generally unreliable	4.4
16. Human touch	4.1
11. Accessible space	3.9
8. Satisfied BUT	3.9
32. Ticketing	3.7
5. Old and shabby	3.2
31. Peace and quiet	2.9
4. Basic facilities	2.9
18. Atypicality	2.8
26. Feeling safe	2.6
12. Travelling discomfort	2.3
2. Dirty trains	2.1
24. Fares	2.1
3. No complaints	2.0
25. What's going on?	2.0
23. Faster trains	1.9
33. Mobile office	1.9
7. Minor quibbles	1.8
14. Very expensive	1.7
30. Renationalise!	1.5
21. Value for money	1.4
22. Announcements	1.1
10. No hassle	0.8
13. Basic efficiency	0.7
27. Transport options	0.6
9. Signalling issues	0.5
28. General annoyance	0.3

transportfocus
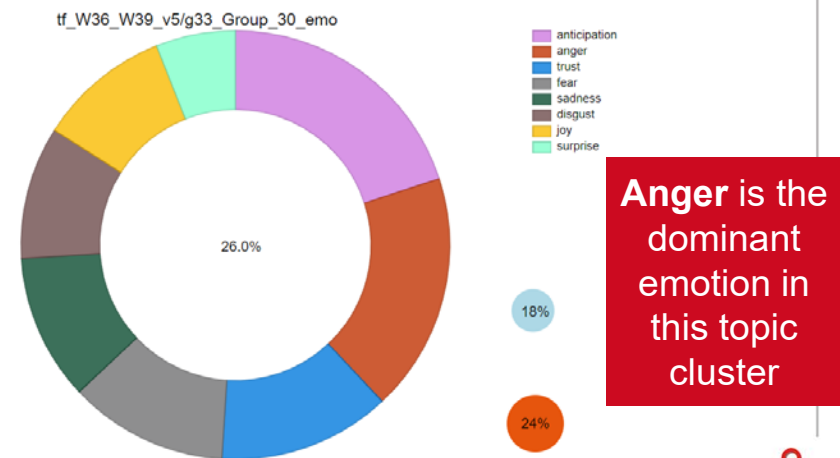
15

The image of the rail industry

So the unavoidable reality is that **trust** is driven by **getting the basics right**. Being reliable, running enough trains to avoid overcrowding, having a smart on-train environment generally – these are the things that make a difference to passengers. Mission statements don't, if they are not delivered

The AI even surfaces a cluster of comments about renationalisation – sometimes targeted at particular TOCs, sometimes more general - where people believe the profit imperative is not balanced by the service they receive. **These comments are not politically motivated, but a cry of pain**

Today was better than usual. I think the national situation is appalling and the train companies should be re-nationalised to enable profits to be re-invested rather than handed to shareholders

Renationalise all operating companies … The service is very bad overall. The train company treats passengers with utter contempt

The rail service would be a lot better if it was re-nationalised. I should not have to think about whether I trust a company when I travel on public transport

tf_W36_W39_v5/g33_Group_30_emo

- anticipation
- anger
- trust
- fear
- sadness
- disgust
- joy
- surprise

26.0%

18%

24%

Anger is the dominant emotion in this topic cluster

transportfocus

Journey purpose

In terms of tangible themes, commuters, business travelers and leisure travelers' comments are very different in tone

Commuters	Business travelers	Leisure travelers
• General (un)reliability of the service • Overcrowding • Fares and value for money • Making tight connections – small delays (by minutes, in some cases) have a big knock-on effect	• Travelling in comfort • Comment on the state of trains (old rolling stock, shabby, dirty, and so on) • WiFi, power, "mobile office" is a priority • Price of tickets/VFM • On-train facilities (toilets, catering) • Pre-booked seats: (a) availability online and (b) actually getting the seat they booked	• Peace and quiet • The human touch – staff helping them, at station and on train • Station facilities, information, announcements etc. • Car parking at stations, and luggage/storage/ buggy space on trains • Comfort on trains, especially longer journeys

Most negative comments and emotions ➡ **Elective journeys elicit fewest negative comments and emotions**

transportfocus

Passenger insights

We know older passengers and less frequent travelers are more forgiving than younger travelers – but they do raise different issues…

Older passengers/ infrequent travelers	People with mobility issues	Younger and more frequent travelers
• Feeling safe • Station facilities • Information: clear, timely and accurate announcements • 'Complicated' ticket machines • Staff to guide them and offer reassurance • Clean/working toilets on trains	• Accessibility – stairs, lifts, long walks to platforms • Need staff to help them with luggage, heavier items generally • Comfortable seating on trains (no standing)	• Often reporting on their work journey or commute • General (un)reliability of the service • Overcrowding • Fares and value for money

Women, especially older women, are more likely to comment about not feeling safe on trains

transportfocus

Station factors

Comments about stations fall into four broad categories

"After I had already bought the tickets I was informed we would not be allowed through the barriers until five minutes before the departure time (in case we got on an earlier train, obviously we looked untrustworthy, but no it wasn't just us it was also a couple with young children, some elderly people and one man on crutches!) This meant we couldn't get to the kiosk shops for a cup of tea or newspaper whilst we waited, nor the toilets, when I pointed out there weren't any seats in the ticket office I was told there were seats outside (it was about 0-1 degree C outside and the benches had frost on) What great customer service from a couple of jobsworths! We'll drive next time…"

INFORMATION

First train delayed, told to go to another platform to catch a different train as it would go out sooner. First train came in but was unable to catch it. The train I was told to get on was full and standing and I couldn't get on. Had to catch a later train around 35 minutes after my train should have left

Missed an earlier train as the platform 6 information board is by platform 5 so I was on the wrong train and by the time the on-train information was displayed it was too late to catch the correct one

Found it very difficult to find out what platform my train would go from. Info boards only give platform for where train destination ends

STAFF

One of the staff at Sittingbourne helped another passenger with a young child onto the train and asked if she needed assistance at the other end. He was very helpful to her and it didn't go unnoticed

The lady member of staff at the station was extremely helpful and polite

Staff were extremely helpful and polite on the train and on the platform/station

Train and train station staff are always pleasant

Station staff come across as rude and abrupt. Not nice when you are asking for help

.

ACCESSIBILITY

I got the last parking space in the car park next to platform three, having already tried the main car park (full) and Easton street (full). Not sure where I would have gone to park next and would have been late

Barking station very poor for platform to concourse accessibility needs escalators or lifts on all platforms

Amersham station needs lift/escalators. Difficult steps for many people

Telford train station requires more parking. It is quite often full

FACILITIES

I appreciate that Queen St station is undergoing refurbishment but the station looks awful at the present time and no shops or cafes

Poor WiFi at St Pancras. Toilets smelly at station and on trains

I went to go and use the ladies' toilets at the station but there was a long queue so was unable to wait that long as I would have missed my train

Toilets at Manchester Piccadilly difficult to use when you have luggage plus have to pay, no water for hand washing in train toilet and the bowl didn't appear very clean

transportfocus

Train factors

These themes play out on trains too

"Seating - I don't find the seating comfortable, I tend to get backache. Refreshments - the announcer usually proudly says Twinings Tea and Starbucks coffee, but I am not impressed with either of those brands. Twinings is part of the same company as Primark, where the clothes are so cheap the people who made them can't have got paid enough. Starbucks have been criticised for not paying tax. CrossCountry should choose a more ethical supplier. I am glad they have started doing a vegan sandwich"

INFORMATION

I think there should be announcements on the train announcing the stations. This is particularly important for visually impaired people

On board announcement said the next station was Hayes & Harlington at every stop on the way from Hayes & Harlington to London Paddington

There were no announcements on the train regarding next stop

So far on my journey there have been no spoken announcements regarding delay or eta or next station etc..

There is a strip sign announcement but what about partially sighted people?

Sometimes the voice of the conductors in announcements on the train is so soft and I cannot hear it. Needs to be loud enough

ACCESSIBILITY

Lack of luggage space, overhead luggage racks are very small. I travelled with a small rucksack and it did not fit in this space

Unable to fit my case on overhead rack. This case fits the racks on the Leicester - Birmingham train

Luggage space on the train fine for small cases, but no where for large cases to be stored

The overhead space to accommodate luggage is too small which makes storing luggage very difficult

There should be better provision for bikes on Arriva Trains. Very often, the meagre space is taken by passengers' luggage and seating

Bicycle spaces and the difficulty of using trains and bikes is very restrictive

STAFF

The staff on hull trains are excellent - exceptionally helpful and friendly

The staff on island line trains are fantastic. Always helpful and courteous and real ambassadors for the isle of Wight

Staff are always pleasant, helpful and courteous

Very helpful staff on the train, friendly and informative

Conductor (male) very pleasant and helpful (not all are)

I would feel safer if a guard was patrolling the trains

I didn't feel safe on the train as no one comes up and down the train if you need help and support

FACILITIES

Find train doors where you have to lean out of the window to open, very difficult to use

Trains (Arriva) are old, smelly, dirty and uncomfortable seats

Train not very clean - smelly, window also pretty grimy

Trains are old and dirty. Seats are dirty

Better toilets and Wi-Fi facilities on trains needed

The toilet facilities are awful, not working, no soap

State of the toilets is always very poor on these trains

transportfocus

Fair fares

Of course people talk about cost. But the **process** of buying tickets – and especially **the right tickets** - comes through as not always as easy as it should be. Passengers often turn to staff to help

Value for money emerges naturally as a cluster

The annual price hikes have to end

Train tickets are way too expensive for a 20min journey

Ticket-cost of the journey a bit on the high side, expensive

Train tickets are too expensive for the journeys taken

Ticket price for the journey too expensive

The price of the ticket was quite expensive

The journey was fine, but the price of the ticket is too expensive

Expensive train tickets

Price of tickets keeps going up, too expensive

The Liverpool St line from Southend is more expensive than the comparative c2c line for a similar journey time

Ticket prices are very expensive to get to Southend from Barking

Transparency and clarity is (almost) as important as price

First bought tickets in machine but it turned out to be also return tickets when I wanted singles. Helpful man at counter helped me change

The one ticket machine at Newton Abbot wasn't working. Long queues in hall for tickets at busy time of day. Luckily ticket barrier man sold me one otherwise I'd have missed my train

I booked my tickets online to collect at Menston station. The machine was out of order so I had to wait for the desk to open. He said I had massively overpaid for my tickets, and it would have been cheaper for me to just turn up on the day. I always thought it was...

I would like to be able to buy tickets from machine beyond the station where I'm starting

Why did we need four single tickets to get the price cheaper?

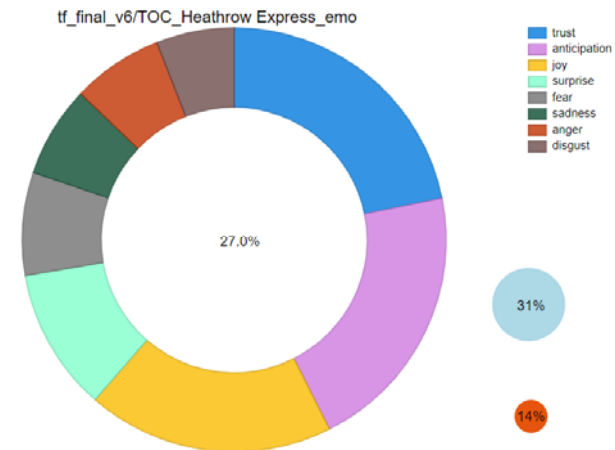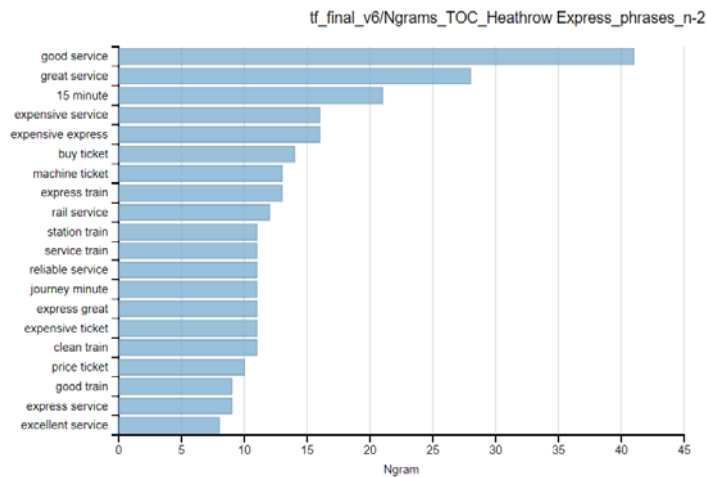transport focus

TOC overview

The types of comments individual TOCs receive are very different, reflecting their distinct characteristics. **Example comparison**:

HEATHROW EXPRESS	VIRGIN TRAINS	SOUTHERN
• WiFi, power, mobile office a plus • Price of tickets a negative • Positive comments about speed, efficiency, no hassle	• Travelling in comfort (often a negative) • Mobile office (power/WiFi not working) • Onboard facilities lacking, problems with toilets and so on	• Delays and cancellations • General (un)reliability of the service • Overcrowding • Fares and value for money

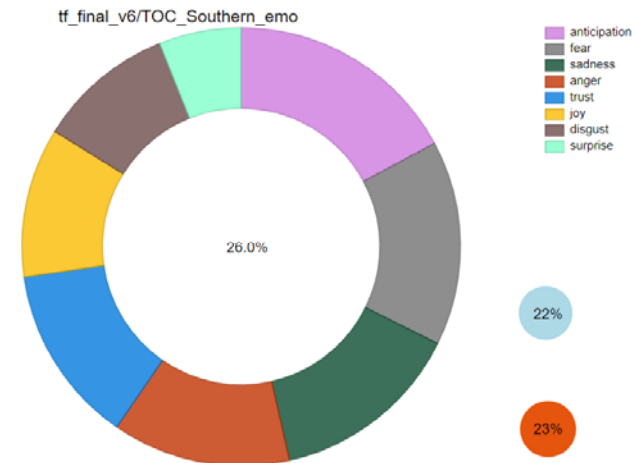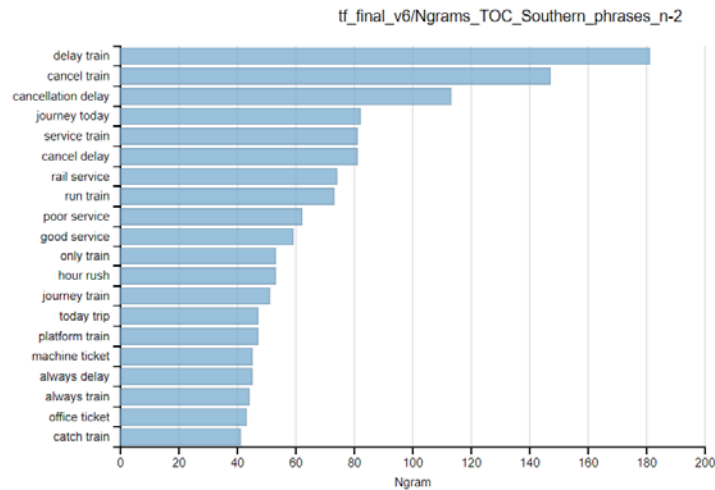Fewest negative comments ➞ Most negative comments

transportfocus

Example comparison

HEATHROW EXPRESS

tf_final_v6/Ngrams_TOC_Heathrow Express_phrases_n-2

tf_final_v6/TOC_Heathrow Express_emo

SOUTHERN

tf_final_v6/Ngrams_TOC_Southern_phrases_n-2

tf_final_v6/TOC_Southern_emo

transportfocus

23

TOC overview

CROSSCOUNTRY

- Seating management is frequently commented on, significantly more than average – for example, prebooked seats not available
- Overcrowding is mentioned, and a lack of power/WiFi

VIRGIN TRAINS

- Travelling in comfort is often cited as a negative factor for Virgin
- Mobile office (power/WiFi not working) is a concern
- Onboard facilities are lacking, problems with toilets and so on

EAST MIDLANDS TRAINS

- Seating management – for example, prebooked seats not available
- Trains are described as old and shabby
- Service more likely to be described as very expensive for what it is

GRAND CENTRAL

- Most likely to attract comments about uncomfortable train environment (aircon, legroom)
- Mobile office (power/WiFi not working)
- Old rolling stock frequently mentioned

transportfocus

TOC overview

HULL TRAINS

- Many positive comments about staff – the human touch is important
- Peace and quiet is an issue for some (quiet zones not observed/enforced)
- Mobile office facilities are often lacking (WiFi/power)

TRANSPENNINE EXPRESS

- Seating management (prebooked seats not available)
- Overcrowding and delays mentioned more frequently than average
- Sometimes onboard facilities are lacking

LONDON NORTH EASTERN

- Old and shabby trains, lacking facilities such as working toilets and onboard catering
- Mobile office facilities are often lacking (WiFi/power)
- Quiet zones not observed/enforced

transportfocus

TOC overview

c2c

- Positive comments about speed, efficiency, no hassle
- However, significantly more comments about rush hour overcrowding
- Quiet zone is a problem for many – not observed/enforced

CHILTERN

- Although many positive journey comments, value for money is an issue
- Chiltern attracts more comments about lack of car parking at stations and lack of space for luggage, bikes etc. on board

GATWICK EXPRESS

- Efficient, no hassle
- WiFi, power, mobile office a plus
- Where there are issues, they centre on signaling issues causing delays, and value for money

GREAT NORTHERN

- More comments than average about general unreliability of service
- Announcements and (misleading or lack of) information at stations and on trains cause stress

transportfocus

TOC overview

GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY

- Signaling issues more frequently mentioned than average
- More likely to be considered very expensive
- Information and seating management (prebooked seats not available) are also issues

GREATER ANGLIA

- More likely to attract positive comments – reliable, no hassle, and so on
- Issues mentioned include ticketing, value for money, and onboard facilities such as WiFi

HEATHROW CONNECT

- Comments focus on general (un)reliability, the need for faster trains, and lack of announcements/ information
- Interconnected frequency and lack of other transport options are issues

HEATHROW EXPRESS

- WiFi, power, mobile office a plus
- Price of tickets a negative
- Many positive comments about speed, efficiency, no hassle

transportfocus

TOC overview

LONDON OVERGROUND

- Overcrowding and rush hour misery are mentioned frequently by commuters
- Feeling safe on train is a negative
- Unreliability and missed connections, including due to signal issues

SOUTH WESTERN RAILWAY

- Broadly more positive comments than average, but with many minor quibbles
- Rush hour issues, in common with other commuter lines
- Lack of information can be an issue

SOUTH EASTERN

- Rush hour issues, in common with many commuter lines
- Most likely to mention frequency/ difficulty of connections, with knock on effects for travelers

SOUTHERN

- Delays and cancellations are rife
- General (un)reliability of the service overweights significantly in comments
- Overcrowding, and commuter misery
- Fares and value for money

transportfocus

TOC overview

TFL RAIL

- Travelling more likely to be described as uncomfortable experience
- Lack of other transport options, dirty trains, a desire for faster trains are strong themes
- As well as the rush hour issues of overcrowding and general unreliability

WEST MIDLANDS RAILWAY

- Fares and value for money are significantly more likely to be mentioned
- Lack of information at stations and on board is an issue

THAMESLINK

- Significantly more comments than average about rush hour misery
- Again, travelling in comfort is a negative, as is general unreliability
- Value for money comes through as a strong negative from the comments

transportfocus

TOC overview

ARRIVA TRAINS WALES

- WiFi, power, mobile office a negative
- Old and shabby trains significantly more frequently mentioned
- Seating management (prebooked seats not available)

MERSEYRAIL

- Many positive comments – no hassle, everything about the journey is fine
- But – significantly higher number of comments about not feeling safe on the journey
- Staff are an asset – the human touch

NORTHERN

- Old and shabby trains a negative
- Significantly higher number of comments than average about not feeling safe on the journey
- The 'renationalise' narrative is particularly strong for Northern

SCOTRAIL

- Fares, ticketing, and getting the right information are the watch outs
- Basic facilities can be lacking, at stations and on trains
- Glasgow Queen street refurbishment attracts a lot of comments

transportfocus

Conclusions: how this helps us gain insight

People use the 'any other comments' opportunity to:

- Reinforce the importance of points they may have made in the more structured questions (for example, fleshing out WHY they were dissatisfied with a journey)

- Make wider contextual points about their (general) travelling experience – for example, talking about feeling safe not on 'this' journey, but on journeys in general (or on other journeys they have had)

- Comment on the state of the nation – the national infrastructure, the way TOCs invest or do not invest (as they see it), the age of rolling stock, and so on

- Talk about stations, especially in terms of accessibility, facilities, confusing announcements, hard-to-navigate ticketing, car parking, and more

- Raise very specific points that may not be highlighted in the survey itself

The comments are a potential gold mine of insight

transport**focus**

Conclusions: what we see in NRPS comments

In general	At the station	On the train
The things that drive trust are the basic truths of travel: on time, reliable, predictability	Improve clarity of information and announcements: need to avoid confusion and stress	Overcrowding and general misery is a constant refrain of commuters
There is no one silver bullet for the passenger experience. It is often an accumulation of small things	Accessibility is frequently referenced – especially by older travelers and leisure travelers with children etc	The train environment is noticed by passengers – a smart, clean train with working toilets goes a long way
Old rolling stock, dirty trains and so on feed a narrative of underinvestment	Station facilities, especially shops and toilets, can be improved (also WiFi)	Where WiFi and power is advertised, it needs to work. Key for business travelers
For frequent travelers, especially commuters, issues are exacerbated	Station staff are a great asset, although there are some stories of rudeness etc	People need to feel safe. Guards play a strong role here, as do other passengers
TOCs vary significantly in terms of the issues raised in the comments – there are many individual learnings	Commuters/season ticket holders aside, there is confusion over ticket prices – transparency and clarity	Simple things like adequate luggage space, room for buggies, bikes, etc. make a big difference

transportfocus

Contact Transport Focus

Keith Bailey, Senior insight advisor

keith.bailey@transportfocus.org.uk

0300 123 0822

transportfocus.org.uk

@transportfocus

transport**focus**