

**Swansea Bridge Strike December 2019 – observations / some points to consider**

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| **Area** | **Comments** |
| Waiting rooms  | Waiting rooms in Cardiff were open and passengers were being signposted to these which was helpful. Infrequent travellers may not know they are there, so this is helpful. Tell them it is warm, there are charging points, but take care when it becomes overcrowded – if a passenger thinks there is somewhere warm to sit, only to find the room is full, they will be disappointed. Signposting to other facilities is helpful – toilets, catering etc. Don’t assume passengers know their way around. In Swansea, the waiting room is not always open in the evening – all available seats need to be accessible to passengers. |
| Online communications were talking about particular lines closed (swanline) | Passengers will ask if the service is able to get to a certain stop. Many will be unfamiliar with the actual routes, only their own part of the journey. Keep it simple, be to the point and do not use industry jargon or acronyms, talk about stops, not routes when dealing with individuals – ask them where they are trying to get to. The information at the time did not allow passengers to put things in context – it was a serious incident and it was clear this was going to cause a lot of disruption. Whilst you have to be careful about the language in order not to cause distress, passengers need to understand a bit more context to understand the gravity of the situation – some may have chosen to work on, find alternative ways home, gone out for a coffee/food and return later when things had calmed. |
| Staff visible at the right place | NR staff were visible right at the top of the stairs in Cardiff, thereby intercepting passengers to alert them to disruption before they had walked too far down the platform. May have benefited from sign at the gateline, or near to platform 3/4 to alert passengers to disruption. Reassuring that staff were on hand to ask for advice – often staff seem to disappear at times of disruption which infuriates passengers as they have to then rely on online information which may not be as up to date. Having staff visible signalled ‘we are here to face the issue head on’.Not the same service in Swansea – how will stations and support be prioritised in the future when CATs teams are mobilised at times of disruption. What can passengers expect? Expectation management if only certain stations are selected. What is the threshold for mobilising a team – consistency of approach.How will passengers be told about the work you are doing? Passengers were not sure what organisation the staff in blue were from. |
| On board train staff  | The flow of information needs to be carried through to end destinations. Passengers will talk about their journey – if they receive great service at Cardiff and they are not well informed for the rest of their journey, the good work will come undone – show you are working together and communicating with each other. The TfW service headed towards Swansea was severely overcrowded and hot. The trolley service was forcing its way on when there was clearly very little room for passengers to manoeuvre, making them angry. At this point, a passenger started to shout, swear and take photos of the conditions. No apology was heard about the delay or the cramped conditions. An acknowledgement that the conditions were less than ideal would have gone a long way. I have seen the tension dissipate in the past when a last minute old and dirty train was brought in to replace a broken down service – staff member apologised and said he recognised that the conditions were not ideal, told passengers what was wrong and why the service was busy (Broken down train, stranded passengers meaning service busier than usual), that he wanted to get people home as quickly and safely as possible, thanking passengers for their patience and for bearing with him. The mood went from one that was fraught with anger to acceptance that they were getting home close to usual time, despite unfavourable conditions – i.e. staff care about them.Most passengers on board the first service through to Swansea thought they were only going as far as Port Talbot and were confused when other passengers said it was going straight through – nobody to tell them either way and were relying on other passengers for information. |
| Driver getting out of train and driving it back in to Swansea. It was dark, passengers cannot see what is happening. | It was the member of staff on the trolley service on the TfW train between Cardiff and Swansea that was telling passengers what was going on…e.g. train going into a loop to avoid the bridge and driving back into Swansea – meaning the driver had to get out and walk the length of the train in the dark to drive it back. It was dark, the train was stopped for a long time and nobody knew what was going on. When the catering trolley staff member told passengers, they were very sympathetic towards the driver and worried about his safety. Keep passengers informed of what is going on – even if there is no new information to report – tell them that to show they have not been forgotten. |
| Information about disruption at Swansea | A lot of passengers turned up to the station oblivious to the disruption they were about to walk in to. A sign at the station entrance may have helped – there was a handwritten poster on a board at Swansea prior to the timetable change that had ‘very important information’ written across the top (akin to the service updates posters on the underground). This was effective in getting people to stop and take notice and it cut through ‘noise’ from all the glossy comms posters that were around the station. |
| Staff performing multiple tasks  | Swansea - define roles. Staff were trying to do too many things at once. Customer information, ops, information control/flow, passenger assist etc. meaning the people who were responsible for managing the flow of information between staff were removed from their core role and getting caught up with general queries. |
| No signage / ushering of passengers to the bus pick up point | Passengers were trying to locate staff to ask where to go. When they did make their way to the bus, there was no driver, so people were going back and forth between the station and the bus pick-up point to find out what was going on – afraid of losing their place in the queue. No staff were outside with the bus to reassure passengers they were in the right place. Not clear who was coordinating this aspect. The pick-up point at Swansea is exposed so not comfortable for passengers to be waiting long periods. Sign would have been helpful. During timetable changes, TfW staff were seen with placards that were visible above the crowds – this might have helped, as would bus staff being identifiable. |
| Staff/comms | There were a couple of instances where passengers were getting a bit anxious about how they were going to get home – biting nails, pacing up and down, circling display boards and starting to get angry – this could have been managed better by giving them information (e.g. why wasn’t the bus replicating the stops of the train instead of making people wait over an hour for the next service? They were waiting in the cold with no seats – they just need an explanation.) Most were understanding when the situation was explained in a calm manner. Instead, complaint forms were being handed out – at that point, they were only asking for information and it did not need to escalate.Use words carefully so as not to inflame the situation – show empathy. |
| Staff talking about what is going on in front of passengers | Staff were talking openly to each other about what was going on – passengers were picking up bits of information, which they went on to relate to other passengers, only for the information to change again.Bus drivers were asking staff where they needed to pick passengers up (looked to a passenger as if they did not know what was happening) – in reality it was just an evolving situation. Be careful what is being discussed in front of passengers. |
| Not everyone will ask for help – identify vulnerable passengers, be proactive. | Passengers were observed circling the information pod, following staff and looking like they needed help but afraid to ask. There were some very young passengers travelling alone who were trying to get home and trying to relate to family members what was going on – clearly unnerved by the situation and getting upset and frightened about being in an unfamiliar situation. Phones needed charging as passengers were constantly checking for updates online, and playing games/checking social media etc to pass the time but there were no facilities to do this. Staff member was seen talking to a young girl’s mum trying to tell her what was going on as the girl was unable to relate back the information properly as she did not understand what the disruption meant for her.Older passengers were standing for long periods in the cold (can anything be done to make sure these are given appropriate attention?)Is there a policy about when taxis will be used and if so how is this communicated to passengers – staff could have signposted them to it? What level of service would you expect if your child / elderly parent was caught up in the disruption? |
| Bus alternatives / ticket acceptance | Staff member was seen giving information about bus services to help some passengers to get where they needed to be sooner. This was helpful as it diverted some passengers from the very busy TfW services that were starting to get through. |
| Delay repay | No proactive information to passengers about delay repay. Many had been waiting considerable time and the possibility of money back may have helped ease the pain – particularly for passengers who do not travel often as they may not be familiar with the process. Consider – if it is the first time they have used the service and feel they have had a bad experience, they are unlikely to use the service again, and may relate tales of their poor experience to others. |
| Who is looking out for passengers at unmanned stations? | Passengers at smaller stations seemed to be less well informed – who is looking out for these people? How is information getting to them? There seemed to be some confusion about whether a train was going to stop or if they were to get a replacement bus – some were said to be on the platform expecting a train and others were waiting at the pick-up point – looks uncoordinated. |
| Hot drink availability | Costa Coffee was open at Swansea, and it was extremely busy. A lot of passengers were seen going back and forth for hot drinks to keep them warm. Facilities such as this are important for passengers.  |
| Keeping barriers open so passengers can move freely around the station find out info / get drinks / find a seat | If passengers have been disrupted, they want to exit the station as quickly as possible and do not want to incur further delays being held up at the gateline. The fact that the barriers were open helped immensely as passengers could move freely around the station – e.g. into the foyer where they can get drinks and snacks, access toilet facilities etc. |
| There were lots of passengers who seemed unfamiliar with the station / routes and infrequent travellers. | Swansea had a lot of passengers who did not seem familiar with the station or were infrequent travellers (e.g. overseas students heading for the airport, couples going on holiday and making their way to the airport, very young passengers who had been shopping in town with friends). These seemed to need extra support – pointing on their phone to the service they needed, asking what their options were, and if they would be able to make their flight/connections. Some with reservations/tickets for specific services wanted to know about the validity of their ticket for use on other services if theirs was cancelled and refunds. Staff need to be equipped to answer queries around ticket acceptance. |