

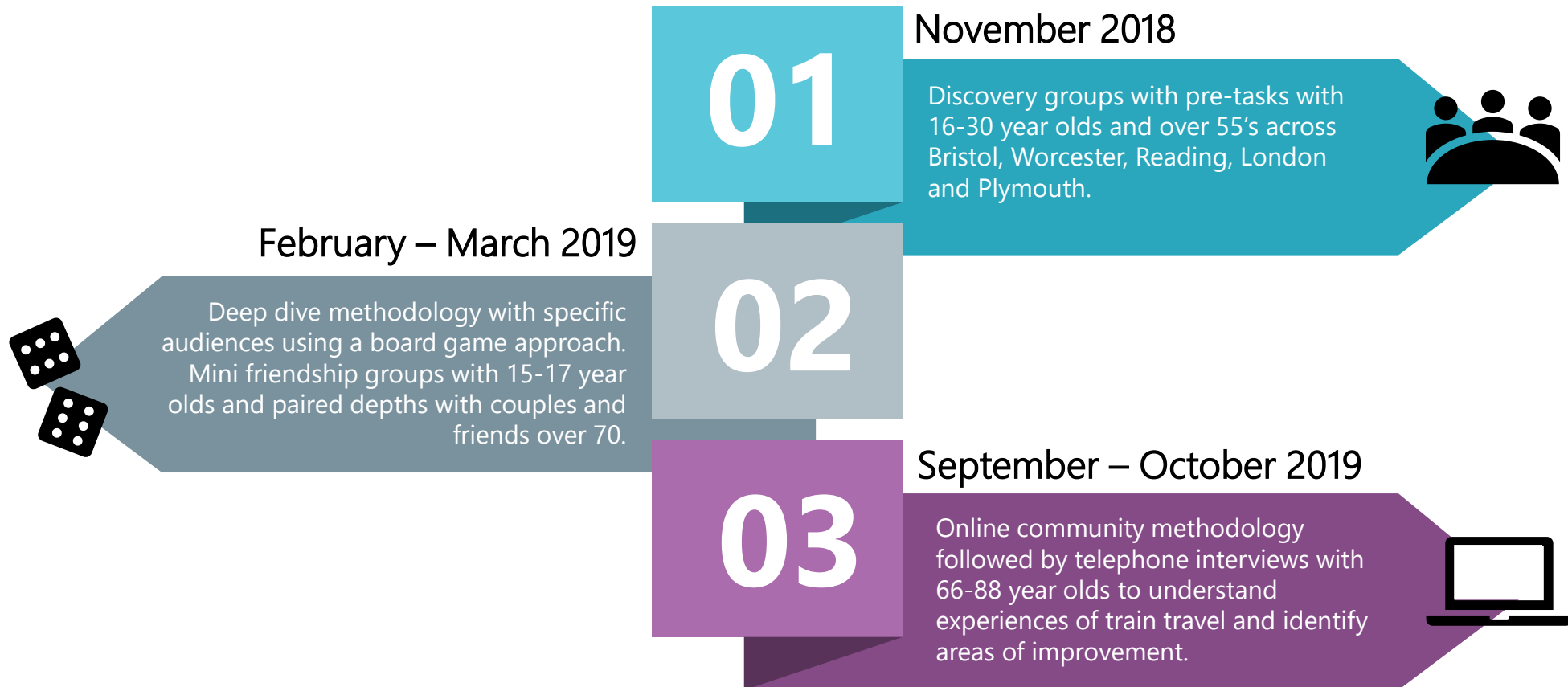
# Transport Focus: Age and the train

Debrief 15<sup>th</sup> October 2019



# Background and objectives

# A recap on the research process



# Research objectives



## Business question

Overall the project is required in order to discover the potential to improve the attractiveness, use and experiences of the railway for:

Older people enjoying retirement and possibly wanting freedom from their car/the stress of the car or enjoying the reduced cost of public transport.



## Key objectives

1. To truly discover the potential for change we need to explore both the practical and emotional influences on mode choice:
  - a) Practically → how might we improve the user journey and experience by removing key barriers, making it easier, more pleasant and ultimately the common sense choice?
  - b) Emotionally → how might we develop the rail offering to fit with each different cohort's values and lives?
2. Findings from the project will include opportunities for the longer term (deeper, strategy-led change).

# Methodology and sample

## Phase one



A two week online community to document experiences and expectations of staff, built environment and the travel experience on GWR.

23 x infrequent and lapsed rail users

- Aged between 66 and 88
- A range of locations along GWR network
- Mix of urban, suburban and rural locations
- Soft quotas on driving behaviours

## Phase two

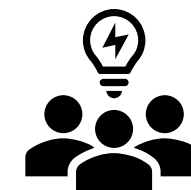


30 minute follow-up phone interviews to learn more about their experiences.

Six x infrequent and lapsed rail users

- Selected based on responses from phase one

# Summary of tasks



Getting to know you	Where do you feel welcomed?	Perceptions of train travel	Station audit	Journey audit	Ideas for the future
An introductory task for participants to familiarise themselves with the platform and understand their lives.	Asking participants to share places where they feel welcomed and unwelcomed.	Asking questions to understand perceptions of train travel, exploring key barriers and motivations.	Where participants travelled to their local train station and documented their experience of finding information and interacting with staff.	An optional task where participants documented their experience of getting the train.	Asking participants what rail companies could change/improve to better meet their needs.

The experiences of train travel within this report are a combination of journey' taken in the past and journeys asked to take as part of this research.

# Summary of findings

Due to lack of recent experience, older audiences can have idealistic or overly negative expectations of train travel. These impact on both the desire to take the train and the actual experience of travel.

Improvements can be made to make older audiences feel acknowledged/thought of:

- Proactive staff
- Physical access to the station and platforms (ramps and lifts etc.)
- Warm and comfortable waiting spaces

Changing the built environment and the behaviour of staff alone will not be enough to encourage older audiences to take the train more often. Compared to the default option of the car, the fundamental barriers remain as:

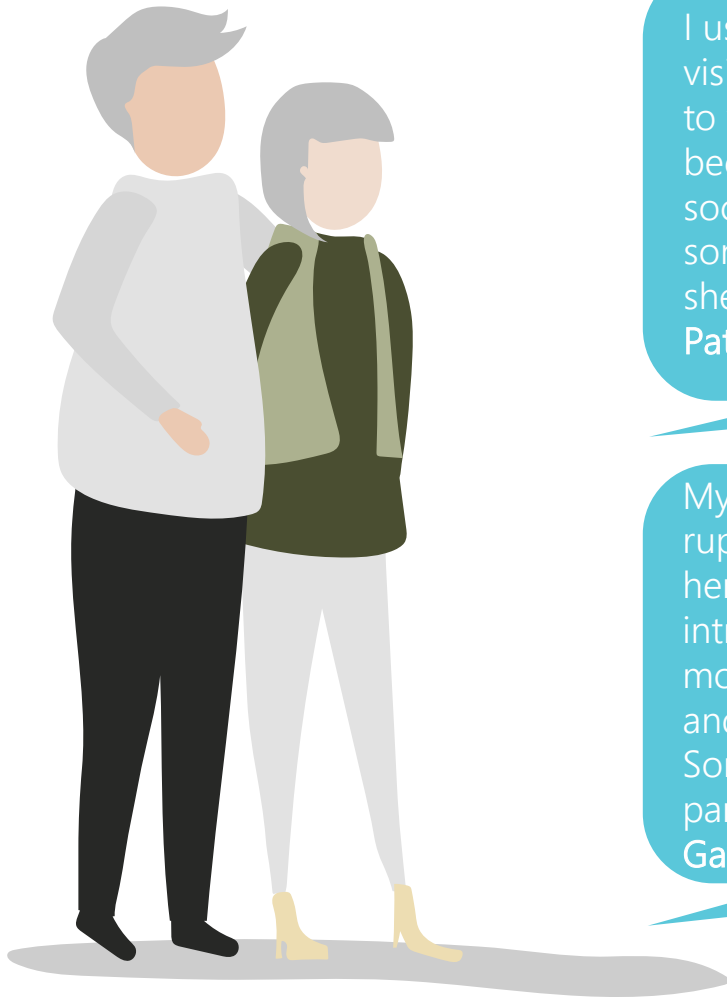
- Inconvenience of access to train stations
- Perceived inconvenience of making three journeys (to the train station, on the train, to their final destination)
- Perception of price when compared to the car, coach or bus



# Understanding older audiences



# Health, experience of loss, and gaining grandchildren are the most significant changes in this audience's lives



I used to get around quite a bit, I used to drive and visit friends and various places. I used to get the train to visit family. I don't do any of those things any more because I don't have the confidence to do it. My social life is now dependent on my family; visiting my son and daughter. My daughter carts me around – she's very good.  
**Pat, 88**

My life has changed for the better because I have more grandchildren and am heavily involved with them. I take the three boys swimming on a Monday and my granddaughter swimming on a Wednesday.  
**Jackie, 74**

My wife died suddenly in February 2015 from a ruptured aortic aneurysm and our plans died with her. To my great delight, and very unexpectedly, I was introduced to a lady who had been widowed a few months before me. We are now very happy together and life has started again for both of us... I now live in Somerset and am being absorbed into my new partner's world.  
**Gavin, 77**

As I am getting older, many of my friends have passed away so life can be lonelier. I now regularly attend senior clubs for the over 60's. Other than aches and pains expected at my age I'm OK.  
**Jean, 79**

# Making the most of their lives now is a priority

My life is much the same as it was five years ago, apart from getting older and a bit slower. I have always been a dancer and two years ago joined a Silver Swans class (Ballet for the over fifties). This, together with my two tap classes a week and swimming has helped, keeps me mobile.

Kathleen, 73

My daughter and granddaughters are living with me now, and we are very close. We do quite a lot together: visiting places, cinema, taking the dogs out. We even went to Florida and I went on a lot of the roller coasters.

Gloria, 76

I had a fall and it knocked my confidence for six. I'm very aware that falls can be lethal – I've slowed down considerably... I have started Tai Chi, it's very calming.

Pat, 88

My name is Peter. I have two married sons, a married step son and two married step daughters. Between them they have twelve children so we tend to be very busy.

Peter, 71

My wife and I spend many weekends visiting different places while I am still fit to drive. We also use our bus passes when possible and also go for walks. We belong to the National Trust and have visited many sites particularly since my wife retired.

John, 72

I welcomed retirement as I have more time to spend with my grand daughters and having more me time... I have started getting out and about more and visiting new places. My health has gone down hill slightly over the last five years which is due to increasing age but generally nothing sinister.

Roy, 66





# Understanding train travel

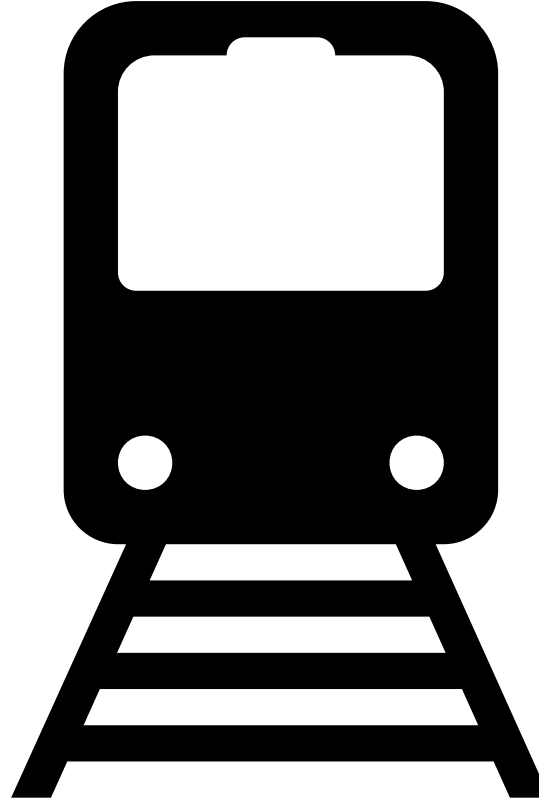
# Older audiences can have mixed feelings towards train travel

A living nightmare

Stressful/physically  
demanding

Lots of different  
companies/privatisation

The expensive way to  
travel



An exciting long trip

"Let the train take the  
strain"

GWR

Views justify the cost

# There are both idealistic and negative expectations of train travel

## IDEALISTIC AND EXCITING

Some older people view train travel through rose-tinted glasses.

- Based on nostalgic memories of steam trains... the sound trains along the track... and the countryside views
- Many would take the train when planning a big trip or visiting family and has exciting associations

Taking a train journey is exciting, something to look forward to. It's something that I do infrequently so invariably it tends to be a big event.  
Ian, 70

If I am going to travel by train I look forward to it as I can sit and relax until I get to my destination, I can read, or look at my mobile.  
Gloria, 76

As a child we often traveled from Yorkshire to Pembrokeshire by train...Rail journeys still have that element of excitement and expectation.  
Peter, 71

## WORST CASE SCENARIO

Others feel intimidated at the thought of train travel, and can't think of anything worse than having to take the train.

- Having previously commuted (e.g. to and from London), their experience of train travel is busy and crowded
- Due to unfamiliarity with train travel many worry about what to do when things do not go to plan i.e. train delays and changing platform

Train travel words: inconvenient, dirty carriages, overcrowded, delays.  
John, 72

There were times when trains were delayed or cancelled... when I couldn't get a seat and had to stand for hours.  
Gail, 67

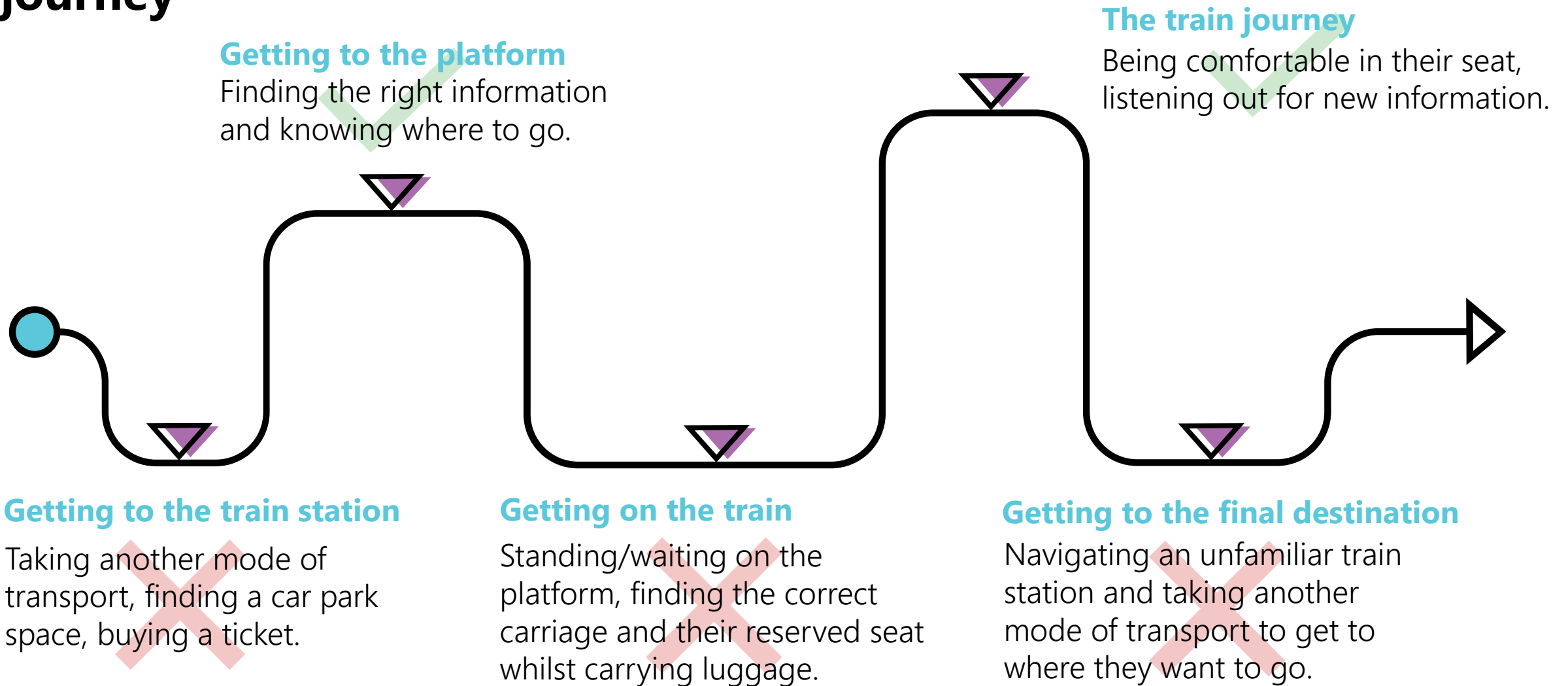


Pat, 88



# The experience of taking the train

# There are highs and lows experienced across the stages of the journey



# Purchasing train tickets is relatively easy but having limited access to the station is a fundamental barrier to taking the train

## The car park

### The car park

Fundamentally, older audiences have limited access to train station.

- Taking the bus or taxi is considered an added expense and would rather drive
- During off-peak times the car park is already full from the commuter rush



Given the problems of parking at Twyford I decided to use the local taxi service after the rush hour.  
Arthur, 78

I went down for the day but couldn't park so I had to park in Waitrose.  
Leslie, 78

## Buying a ticket

### Purchasing a ticket

Older audiences prefer to purchase a ticket face to face so they can ask questions about platforms there and then.

- A few who bought their train ticket on the day felt rushed and panicked, and were aware that they needed to get to the platform and may miss the train.

Some passengers have booked online for a previous trip and found the online purchase straightforward.

- However, having to find the best deal is frustratingly complicated, with various websites offering different prices for the same deal



If the station was unmanned I would have to go back another time.  
Jean, 80



# PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE: Getting to the train station

Name: John  
Age: 77  
Nearest station: Twyford

"It's not easy to get to the station by car because of the parking. I usually rely on a lift from someone to get places, or I'd get a taxi."



## 1 How does John feel about train travel?

- Train travel is relaxing and scenic
- It allows him to travel long distances with ease, without having to drive and he can make multiple stops for food or toilet breaks

## 2 What are his concerns about train travel?

- His local train station isn't accessible due to a busy car park
- Having to pay for the car park
- Walking long distances from the car to the station
- Not always being guaranteed a seat

## 3 What was his experience of getting to the train station?

- Getting to the train station was complicated as there is only one entrance for cars
- Due to lack of spaces he parked at the bottom of a hill and had to walk up the hill to the train station
- The train station itself felt small and he imagined buying a ticket at peak times to be stressful

The entrance to the station was OK, but the foyer was small. If it was busy it would be a nightmare to buy a ticket.  
John, 77

# Signage and staff communicating relevant information clearly puts older passengers at ease

## Finding correct information



Communicating train information (times of trains, platforms, and delays) clearly puts older audiences at ease.

- Digital screens and tannoy were appreciated but some struggled to read the screens and hear the announcements
- If in doubt they would look for staff who they would expect to be helpful and informative

The screens gave good information on arrival and departure trains. They also showed what platform they would be leaving from.

Amanda, 71

## Using facilities



The quality of the built environment varies between stations.

- Reading station was praised for its modern look and cleanliness, whereas rural locations felt drab and dreary

All in all, older audiences appreciate having use of facilities (toilets, cafes and seating).

- Frustration occurs when they are unsanitary, inaccessible or closed



Staff on the platform were helpful, I asked where the toilet was because I couldn't find one on the platform. They apologised and directed me to the only public toilet in the station over on the other platform.

Gail, 67

## Walking to the platform



There is a sense of urgency to get to the platform for this cohort.

- There is some worry they will miss the train
- Seeing footbridges is stressful and physically demanding of this age group, especially if carrying luggage



I was waiting on the wrong platform and the... connection was two steep footbridges away. Carrying heavy luggage I had to go as fast as I could to catch the train which I did with only a few minutes to spare. It was a very stressful and tiring experience.

Pat, 78

# PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE: Getting to the platform

Name: Pat  
Age: 73  
Nearest station:  
Weston-superMare

"The train station could do with some TLC: a lick of paint of some flowers would do a world of good."



## 1 How does Pat feel about train travel?

- Pat associates train travel with steam trains and as an exciting mode of transport
- Train travel is nostalgic and reminds her of childhood memories of taking the train

## 2 What are her concerns about train travel?

- Train timetables are unclear and the trains times are unreliable – she worries she may miss her train
- Train journeys that involve changing platforms are stressful as information may be misheard

## 3 What was her experience of getting to the platform

- After purchasing her ticket, Pat used the digital screens to find which platform her train was arriving into. This was clear to read
- She had to walk over a large footbridge to reach her platform which took her a while
- If she was in a rush or had luggage with her she would have taken the lift

The time of arrival for the train was clear on the digital screen and I could actually hear the tannoy message clearly.  
Pat, 73

# Older audiences anticipate a stressful journey when waiting for the train to arrive

## Waiting on the platform

On the platform there are many things that could go wrong or that one might worry about:

1. Not having anywhere to sit and being uncomfortable
  - Some train stations do not have suitable seating/areas to shelter from bad weather.
2. The train being delayed
  - Added stress of missing a connecting train
  - Waiting outside for extended time can affect health.
3. Not being able to get to their reserved seat in time
  - Many are confused as to where they should stand on the platform to get to their designated carriage.



A little apprehensive about what to expect; not been on a station platform for a few year, let alone a train.  
Gail, 67

I did wonder whether my booked seat on the Bristol to Cardiff train would still be available.  
Peter, 71

It got a bit confusing finding my already booked seat as the carriages were not marked clearly it was very worn on the outside and nothing on the inside, I had to ask the lady in the buffet car where it was.  
Amanda, 71

Getting on board was fine as my seat was pre booked and I had assistance to carry my luggage.  
Jean, 80

## Finding your seat

Getting on to the train and finding their seat is physically demanding for this audience.

- Physically unable to stand for long journeys
- Carrying luggage onto the train would require assistance
- Being able to sit down and enjoy the views, have a conversation is part of the idealised experience

Older passengers can feel anxious to ask other passengers for a seat.

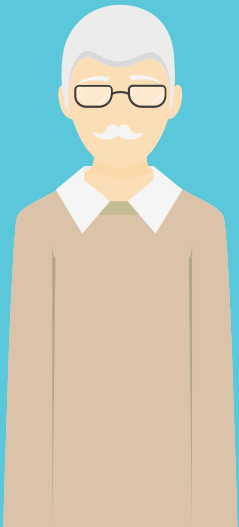
- Especially during busy times when everyone is standing



# PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE : Getting on the train

Name: Peter  
Age: 71  
Nearest station: Yatton

"Our reserved seats had been taken by others, and they were unwilling to move until staff were called to help. I just felt rushed, harassed and ill at ease."



## 1 How does Peter feel about train travel?

- Train travel reminds Peter of childhood trips from Yorkshire to Pembrokeshire
- Taking the train feels exciting as he would likely use this mode of transport for a big day out with his family

## 2 What are his concerns about train travel?

- Not being able to hear the announcements on the platform
- Not being guaranteed a seat (had experienced this from a previous journey to a rugby match)

## 3 What was his experience of getting on the train

- Standing on the platform in the rain was not enjoyable, but couldn't risk standing in the foyer in case he missed the train
- It wasn't clear on the platform where he needed to stand, nor was the labelling of the carriages. This created some anxiety around whether they'd get to their seats in time

The train was again extremely crowded making it almost impossible to move to the toilets or buffet. I have no idea whether there was one on the train.

Peter, 71



# Once in their seat, the experience improves

## Being on the train



Once/if they find a seat, older audiences enjoy the journey.

- They anticipate their final destination (seeing family, going to the theatre)
- Enjoy other people's company
- Begin to appreciate the ease of taking the train in comparison to having to concentrate when driving a car

Staff are not often seen, when they are it is reassuring, If anything was to go wrong, there is someone to ask for help.

- E.g. when their stop is, where the toilets are

That said, the onboard environment can sometimes be disappointing.

- Chewing gum
- Litter



## Using the facilities

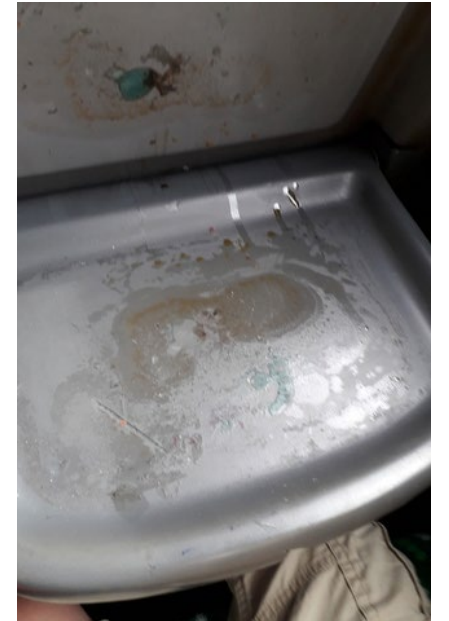


Facilities on the train were disappointing, but expected.

- The cleanliness of toilets and seating areas was hit and miss
- Trains that offer refreshments are appreciated but considered over-priced

There were announcements and very helpful explaining where your next stop was going to be.  
Jean, 80

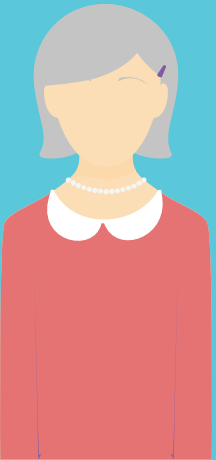
The train was very tired looking, there were discarded newspapers, empty drink bottles, coffee cups and sandwiches wrappers on tables and the floor. We moved from our first seat because the tray table was disgusting.  
Gail, 67



# PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE: On the train

Name: Virginia  
Age: 76  
Nearest station: Twyford

"I feel quite confident taking the train, I've taken the train across the country before."



## 1 How does Virginia feel about train travel?

- Brings back memories of steam trains
- It's an enjoyable journey where you can sit back, relax and enjoy a conversation with friends

## 2 What are her concerns about train travel?

- That the train would be too busy
- Taking the train at night is scary as she would feel more vulnerable

## 3 What was her train journey experience?

- Able to find her seat quickly and enjoy the view
- There were regular updates on the train that made her feel at ease
- Facilities on the train (toilets and seat trays) were dirty, but she didn't need to use them
- Train staff checking tickets were polite but didn't add anything to the journey

I actually like taking the train, as I can rest, read or just look out the window. I drive a lot and this requires concentrating much more. On the train I can relax... I can read, nod off, or just look out the window and it is peaceful and I'm in my own thoughts.

Virginia, 76

# Having to arrange further travel is inconvenient for this audience

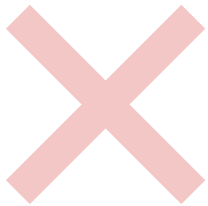
## Finding other transport



The end of a train journey is not the end of the overall journey.

It's an added inconvenience and/or expense to arrange additional travel to get to where they want to go.

- In comparison to car travel where they can arrive at their final destination



Travelling by train is comparatively inconvenient for anything other than long journeys. I have to get to the station and park the car (at a cost) and on arrival at the destination I would have to get a lift or a taxi. A repeat of the above for the return journey.

Gavin, 70

Going by train you have to find two modes of transport as you need a taxi or bus to get to your eventual destination.

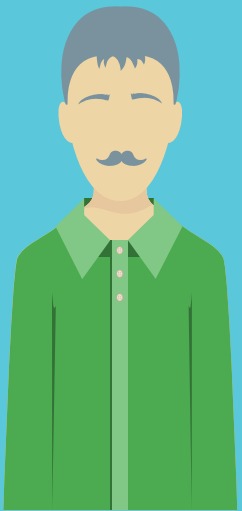
Pat, 88



# PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE: Getting to the final destination

Name: Leslie  
Age: 78  
Nearest station:  
Weston-super-Mare

"If I then need a couple of bus trips, the car wins every time."



## 1 How does Ian feel about train travel?

- Doesn't get the train often and would rather take the car out of convenience
- Used to take the train a lot when he was working which has left bad memories

## 2 What are his concerns about train travel?

- Arranging transport and/or driving to and from the train station as it's an added journey to an already long journey
- His preferred destinations aren't near a train station
- Being in unfamiliar train stations and not knowing what to do next

## 3 What was his experience of getting to his final destination

- Enjoyed a relaxing train journey to Bristol Temple Meads with his wife, they were able to find two seats sat next to each other
- Upon arrival there was a bus station and taxi rank outside the train station but this wasn't suitable for his, nor his wife's, needs
- Upon reflection, taking the train became very inconvenient as it involves additional travelling that needs to be planned for

I am not sure how someone with severe physical disabilities would be able to cope. The inconvenience of not having your own transport when you arrive at your destination.  
Leslie, 78



# Summary and moving forward

# Staff can make a difference

## Opportunity to be more visible, pro-active and consistent

- Most of the feedback on staff is positive
- Staff have a particularly important role to play in ensuring older people have a comfortable journey
- Some older people would prefer a more pro-active approach
- Maintaining a clean environment is a high priority for older people

Most of the staff I have dealt with are very polite but there are a few who make you think you are spoiling their day by asking them a question.

Amanda, 71

It would be helpful to have a member of staff available for those who need help i.e. ensuring they are about to board the right train.

Roy, 66

I would appreciate someone recognizing older people and saying 'Can I help you?'

Carolyn, 75

When assistance is booked, when arriving at the station I would like to see that person so I know who to look for when the train arrives.

Jean, 80



# Designing train travel for older people

- **Accessibility at stations**
  - Ensure timetable boards are clear to read and tannoys clear to hear
  - Reduce gaps between platform and train
  - Step-free access to train
  - Clear markings of where each numbered carriage will be stopping
- **Onboard experience**
  - Older people had a greater need for information on the journey – ensure this is enabled through continued access to their devices (via Wi-Fi) and onboard information
  - Consider accessibility within trains – walking over suitcases to get to toilets
- **Proud stations**
  - Clean and well maintained
  - Design train stations to capture spirit/essence of area with symbolism



# Overcoming fundamental barriers for older people

Convenience and cost remain high barriers to usage among this age group

## INCONVENIENT ACCESS

- It will become harder for older people to access stations – particularly as so many are reliant on the car to get to the stations currently

I live close enough to walk if need be. But times change. My wife and I are approaching 80 and the bones and joints are likely to start creaking and perhaps even seizing up. At the moment, we drive but that can change. There is a local bus terminal and a taxi rank in the station but taxis are expensive and Weston local bus services are very poor both in route choice and service times...

Leslie, 78

At least some station car parks should have a few 'off-peak' spaces, ones that can only be used after 9.15 or 9.30 - even 10am perhaps - to encourage shoppers and others to use the train. If you drive to a station, as I did, and then can't find a parking space, it puts you off even trying again.

Virginia, 76

## CAR, COACH AND BUS FEEL CHEAPER

- Perceptions of value come under pressure from competition (car and coach)
- Compared to these – what can train do to appear good value for older people?

I too feel the pricing is far too high and therefore would catch the coach as it's so much cheaper. Not only the rail ticket but parking prices at the station bump up the cost of travelling by train.

Roy, 66

There doesn't appear to be a correlation between quality and price. If the service was top notch and superb facilities and a comfortable ride then price is not so much an issue.

Pat, 73

# Next steps?

Quantify drivers of experience / reluctance for this audience

- Hygiene factors (e.g. I can get to the station)
- Success factors
- Nice to have
- Delighters (station environment, premium experience?)

Work with Local Authorities to improve access to local stations for older, off-peak users.

Identify bright spots of staff behaviour and station design for older people then encourage consistency across system.





# Thank you

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