



Transpennine Route Upgrade:

what do passengers want?

Foreword

Passengers using trains on this key route across the Pennines want a punctual and reliable railway with sufficient seats on trains for all. They want improvements now. Previous poor performance leads some to doubt whether the rail industry can deliver on the promises of the upgrade and all are concerned about the magnitude of the disruption.

Nevertheless, passengers see the upgrade as essential and are supportive. Most recognise that they will have to live with disruption but want the railway to plan to minimise the impact on them. They hope much of the work can be done overnight, that weekday commuters can be protected as much as possible and that disruption in the winter months is avoided due to the harsh weather.

Communicating the impact of the works in a clear and timely fashion is critical so passengers can plan their lives. Passengers prefer to stay on a train even if a diversionary route around a closure takes longer. Where replacement road transport is unavoidable, they want a high quality, well-planned service and expect compensation.

Transport Focus has already been using the research findings in our work with the industry and will continue to work with the rail companies to ensure passengers' views are heard.

David Sidebottom

Transport Focus Director

The upgrade

Network Rail is planning a multi-billion pound programme of improvements to the route between Manchester and York via Huddersfield and Leeds (see map on page four). The project, known as the Transpennine Route Upgrade aims to improve capacity, reliability, train frequency and journey times.

The engineering work required to deliver these benefits will inevitably mean significant disruption for passengers. The main work is expected to start in 2021 and continue well into the 2020's.

Transport Focus research

This research explored passengers' views on the potential benefits, impact of disruption, scheduling of line closures, alternative transport options, communications and compensation. This summary seeks to set out concisely what passengers want and expect from the industry and to serve as a benchmark against which the railway's planning and delivery can be measured. The full research findings are available on the Transport Focus website¹.

"I'd need about six months' notice of any alternatives just to plan things and get things in order."

Vulnerable passenger

¹ Transport Focus, Transpennine Route Upgrade: what do passengers want? June 2020

<https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research-publications/publications/transpennine-route-upgrade-what-do-passengers-want/>

Passengers' views on the upgrade

Recommendation 1: To maintain support throughout the works the railway must deliver on its promises and ensure passengers see improvements to capacity and reliability.

- When the research was conducted in summer 2019, trust in the industry was low due to poor punctuality and reliability and the legacy of the May 2018 'timetable crisis'.
- Passengers want the upgrade to address their concerns about capacity, in other words getting a seat on the train, and punctuality and reliability. Journey time improvements are a lower priority until these basics are met.
- Even when passengers were made aware of plans to build a new line, known as 'Northern Powerhouse Rail', the upgrade of the existing Transpennine Route was still seen as necessary. Improvements are needed now, passengers do not want to wait.
- The upgrade is strongly supported by passengers, but they have concerns about the scale and duration of the disruption and the industry's ability to deliver.

"Please listen to your customers and work to resolve these issues - communication is the key - keep talking, keep listening."

Manchester passenger

Duration and scheduling of the works

Recommendation 2: Demonstrate to passengers that the railway is planning and delivering the work to minimise the impact on passengers.

- Passengers expect the industry to use its expertise to plan the works to minimise disruption to all. They are initially alarmed by the potential number and duration of line closures. When pressed, most agree the priority should be avoiding weekday closures that would impact commuters.
- Passengers are reluctant to accept long closures but can understand the need to balance intensity of the disruption and the total duration of the works.
- When the railway must be closed, passengers' order of preference is: overnight; at weekends; bank holidays; school summer holidays; Easter/half term holidays. Passengers are less tolerant of disruption over Christmas and New Year.
- Passengers would rather work is avoided during the winter months. They are concerned the harsh weather and limited daylight will mean discomfort while waiting for trains or buses and could also cause delays to the work itself.

"The changes will need to be done and it will make a big difference but be realistic with the timeframe and how it will disrupt passengers."

Huddersfield passenger

Managing disruption to passengers' journeys

Recommendation 3: Keep passengers on trains – this is what they are paying for. Where this is not possible, provide high quality rail replacement services and communicate this to give passengers confidence.

- Passengers want the railway to keep people on trains whenever possible and prioritise capacity and reliability of rail services throughout the works.
- Train services on longer/slower routes around closures are still attractive, even to those with a car, if the journey times are comparable to road travel.
- When sections of the route are closed passengers expect diversionary routes, for example the Calder Valley, to have enough trains and carriages to meet the additional demand and avoid further disruption to existing passengers.
- Based on previous experience, passengers have low expectations of rail replacement services. To meet passengers' needs, rail replacement services should have high quality, accessible vehicles, adequate waiting facilities, helpful staff, real-time information, minimise interchanges and offer a choice of 'express' and 'stopping' services. Passengers generally consider coaches to be preferable to buses; the industry must therefore strive to source enough accessible coaches.

"Provided I could get a seat on the train, I'd prefer the train. Even if it's slower. It's more comfortable, it's easier, and I've got this perception that it's more reliable."

Huddersfield passenger

Journey planning information

Recommendation 4: Prioritise communicating accurate and timely information about the specific impact of the works on passengers' journeys, and their options, so they can plan their lives.

- Timetables must be finalised well in advance so passengers can rely on them, with 12 months' notice provided for longer closures to allow passengers to plan annual leave and when/how to renew season tickets.
- Many passengers are willing to sign up for journey updates and alerts via apps, email or social media, but expect the full range of communication channels to be used to raise awareness and ensure they are kept informed.

Maintaining passenger support

Recommendation 5: Publicise compensation for commuters up front to recognise the disruption and ensure passengers can receive regular, open and honest reports on the upgrade progress.

- Commuters expect compensation, especially if they must use rail replacement bus or coach services.
- Once passengers understand their journey options, the scale and duration of the upgrade means there is an appetite to learn about the work and the benefits. There is an expectation following each significant closure of the railway that passengers will see tangible improvements to their journeys.
- Tone of communications is important – they should be open and honest about the work and show empathy for the impact on passengers.

"I want to believe it can happen. How will you and your company convince me? What is your communication plan? How will you build trust?"

Leeds passenger

"It's a good long-term plan but short term and during [the work] I think you should discount passenger fares."

Huddersfield passenger

"Keep things simple, look after your regular customers and please communicate as much as you possibly can."

Leeds passenger

Ensuring passengers' views continue to be heard

Transport Focus has briefed the industry on the research findings and will continue to challenge the rail companies to demonstrate how they will meet passengers' needs. As the

engineering work begins, Transport Focus plans to monitor the passenger experience and work with the rail industry to ensure passengers' views are heard.

Background to the research

Transport Focus identified the importance of ensuring that passengers' views are understood by the railway industry. We welcome that Network Rail recognised this and asked us to carry out this research.

This qualitative research is drawn from in-depth discussion with 106 passengers in summer 2019 who make journeys from various stations along the route. Focus groups were conducted in Manchester, Leeds and

Huddersfield and 10 depth interviews were conducted with disabled passengers. The research included people travelling to work or education, for business or leisure purposes and making long and short distance journeys.

These research findings were in keeping with our existing evidence base, including our previous research *Rail passengers' experiences and priorities during engineering works (2017)*².

² Transport Focus, Rail passengers' experiences and priorities during engineering works, October 2017 <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research-publications/publications/rail-passengers-experiences-priorities-engineering-works/>

Afterword



The Transpennine Route Upgrade will enable a step change in services for passengers, improving train capacity, reliability, frequency and journey times between York, Leeds, Huddersfield and Manchester. We are committed to putting passengers first with this programme as it is delivered to minimise disruption; it's the reason I commissioned this important piece of research.

The findings provide a vital evidence base that Network Rail, train companies and other industry partners are using to inform the planning and delivery of this project. Already this research has helped us to develop our thinking on issues such as

diversionary route planning, accessibility, and, crucially, the way we communicate to passengers during times of planned change.

To build passengers' trust in the railway, it's vital we deliver what we say we will, when we say we will, and that we get our communications right. We intend to continue working with Transport Focus as the Transpennine Upgrade develops to make sure we're doing just that.

Rob McIntosh

Managing Director
Eastern Region, Network Rail

Transpennine Route Upgrade map

