

Clarity of information for transport users – train company website assessment (March 2021)

In February 2021 Transport Focus carried out an assessment of train company website information to provide a snapshot of the quality of information available at the time. This follows previous reviews in June and another for the Department for Transport in September 2020.

Overall, we found that the information has improved. However there were still some key issues which are outlined in this report. It is also worth noting that the results reflect the information that was available at the time. Several changes have since been made in response to our feedback.

It is important that operators review website information regularly to ensure it is up to date, accurate and provides reassurance. This will enable those who are travelling or planning future journeys to travel with confidence, which is crucial as lockdown restrictions are eased.

Key issues

Is it clear what the current rules on refunds are?

There have been several changes to refund rules since the pandemic began so it's important that the information is clear and up to date/accurate. We found a lack of consistency in the way the rules were explained. Some operators were neglecting to remove rules that were no longer relevant. It is important that existing text is regularly reviewed to see if it is still applicable. At times when the refund rules are complicated there is also value in having some standard text that all operators could use.

Is it clear how busy individual services are?

We looked to see if there was any indication (tool/journey planner) of how busy individual services are so passengers can avoid these. We appreciate there are currently few passengers travelling but we know that the ability to social distance is still important to those that are. It may be that there are no issues with social distancing on any services. If this is the case it should be made clear rather than showing out-of-date or no information. We found that the quality of information on crowding varied between operators.

Our [research](#) during the pandemic consistently shows the ability to social distance is the most important driver in perceptions of safety. We have also found the majority of passengers would find crowding information very useful or fairly useful in the coming months as restrictions are eased, as well as in the future when the virus no longer poses a significant risk. It is therefore important for operators to continue to update and improve the information made available to passengers to enable them to plan and travel with confidence.

Is it clear that passenger assist (both bookable and ‘turn up and go’) is still being provided?

Although most operators make it clear on the Covid-19 page that both services are still available, and what additional measures are in operation, it isn't always made clear on the passenger assist page. For those who have bookmarked the assistance pages, it is important that the information is consistent with the Covid-19 page.

Rather than both pages having to mirror each other we suggest that it is fine to link one page to the other. For example, on the Passenger Assistance page it could say 'Click here to see how we're keeping you and our staff safe when providing assistance during the pandemic' and then link to the relevant Covid-19 page.

Is it clear how passenger assistance is different to normal?

We continue to see varying quality in the information provided by different operators. We often found just a couple of examples of how the service may differ and these were often only aimed at wheelchair users. There was often limited information on how the service might differ for those with non-visible disabilities. We know that operators are doing a wide range of things to ensure that assistance is carried out safely and it seems as though this isn't always being conveyed through their websites.

To provide reassurance, it's crucial that operators make clear how the many service offerings will differ from usual. For example, how staff will help those who need to lip-read now that there is a requirement to wear a face covering, or what help with luggage is available. Southeastern and Chiltern provide good examples of this. In respect of guidance for passengers with visual impairments we think it important that there is positive confirmation that this service is still provided. Although we're not aware of any rail operator withdrawing the service, London Underground's decision to withdraw it attracted a lot of publicity. We believe a positive statement would help reassure visually impaired passengers that guidance is still being provided, but with some added precautions.

The availability of staff and how to seek help if required.

We often found this was woven throughout the Covid information, specific to situations such as contacting staff if the last train is full. We know passengers value the presence of staff and during the pandemic it is reassuring to know whether they will still be available or how to make contact should you need assistance. Several train operating companies have captured this in one statement or an FAQ, which provides added reassurance. Cross Country (see below), Stansted and South Western Railway all provide examples of best practice.

'Station staff are still available for advice and there is Help points at non staffed stations. If you require "live" help whilst travelling, you can contact our customer relations by telephone: 03447 369 123 (08:00-16:00) or our Social Media team on Facebook via CrossCountry Trains or Twitter @crosscountryuk available 24/7. On board staff are also there to help during your journey.'

Are the refund rules clear at point of purchase?

There were no additional restrictions for passengers purchasing tickets at the time these audits were carried out. We were looking to see whether it was clear that Advance tickets are non-refundable. All operators did this although on some booking pages the information was more obvious. Given the number of changes to ticket refund restrictions it would be useful for train operating companies to provide a link to the Covid-19 refunds page to encourage passengers to check prior to travel.

South Western Railway makes the ticket restrictions clear during the booking process. It draws attention to the fact that services are subject to late notice changes/cancellations, to encourage passengers to check closer to travel. There is also a link to its crowding data and assisted travel page. Although we weren't specially looking for these, we felt this was an example of best practice.

Individual train operator website assessments

		Avanti West Coast	c2c	Chiltern	XC	EMR	GTR	GWR	GA	Heathrow	LNER	WMT	Merseyrail	Northern	ScotRail	SWR	SE	TfL	TPE	Stansted	
Who may travel	1a	Are National lockdown restrictions made clear.	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	A	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
	1b	Are any government restrictions on cross border travel made clear.	G	N/A	G	G	N/A	N/A	G	G	N/A	G	G	N/A	N/A	A	N/A	N/A	G	G	G
Face coverings	2	Is the government travel safely guidance made clear.	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	A	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
	3a	Is it clear where face coverings are mandatory .	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	A	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
	3b	Is there clear advice given on cross border journeys (where applicable)	G	N/A	G	G	N/A	N/A	G	N/A	N/A	G	N/A	N/A	N/A	G	N/A	N/A	A	G	N/A
	3c	Is it clear that there are exemptions when it comes to face coverings.	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	A	G	A	G	G	G
	3d	Is it clear what these exemptions are.	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	A	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
Fares/ticketing/refunds	3e	Is there any mention of what can happen if you do not wear one (and have no valid reason not to)?	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	A	G	G
	3f	Is this information displayed prominently.	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	A	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	A	G	G
	4a	Is it clear there are changes to timetables to encourage passengers to check before travelling?	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
	5a	Is it clear whether reservations are mandatory, advised or not required.	G	G	G	G	A	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	A	G
	5b	If only advisory, is it clear that you risk not being able to board.	G	N/A	N/A	G	N/A	N/A	A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	G	G	G	G	N/A	N/A
	5c	Is it clear where reservations are mandatory how to change your flexible ticket reservation.	N/A	N/A	N/A	G	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	G	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	6	Is it clear whether cash is still accepted.	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
	7	Is it clear if any ticket offices are closed or have amended opening hours? (If all are open as usual this should be stated)	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	N/A	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
	8	Is it clear what the current rules on refunds are.	G	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	G	A	A	A	A	G	A	A	A	A	A
	8b	Are the refund rules clear at point of purchase.	G	N/A	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	N/A	G	G	G	N/A	G	G	G
Assistance	8c	Is there a link provided on where to claim.	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	A	G	G	G	G	G	G	
	9	Is it clear that passenger assist (both bookable and turn up and go) is still being provided.	R	G	A	A	G	G	A	G	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	G	G	A	A
Providing reassurance	10	Is it clear how passenger assistance is different to normal.	A	A	G	A	A	G	A	G	R	G	G	R	A	G	G	G	G	G	A
	11	Is it clear what social distancing measures are in place at stations? E.g. queuing/one-way systems	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
	12	Is it clear what social distancing measures are in place on trains? E.g. where do passengers sit.	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
	13a	Is it clear when is the best time to travel and when is best to avoid.	G	A	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	A	G	G	G	G	G
	13b	Is it clear how busy individual services are? Is there any indication (tool/journey planner) of how busy particular services are so passengers can avoid these.	A	G	G	A	G	G	G	G	N/A	G	G	N/A	NA	R	G	G	G	A	G
	14	Is it clear what happens if the train you want is too full to board safely? [Board safely meaning passengers can socially distance]	G	G	G	G	G	A	G	A	G	G	A	G	A	G	G	A	A	A	A
	15	Is it clear what happens if the last train you want is too full to board safely.	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	R	G	G
	16	Is it clear what additional cleaning is being carried out?	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	A	G	G	G	G	G	G	A	G	G
	17	The availability of hand sanitiser: Is it clear where it is provided and/or that passengers are encouraged to bring their own.	G	G	G	G	A	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
	18	Is the availability of toilets at stations and on trains clear.	G	G	G	G	G	G	A	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
General website	19	Is the availability of catering clear (if applicable) and if the service is different from how it was previously?	G	N/A	G	G	G	N/A	G	G	N/A	G	N/A	N/A	G	G	G	N/A	G	G	
	20	Is the availability of waiting rooms made clear.	G	A	A	G	G	G	A	G	N/A	G	A	G	A	R	G	A	G	G	
	21	The availability of staff and how to seek help if required.	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	A	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	
	22	Is it clear when the information was last updated and is this frequent	G	G	G	G	G	A	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	
	23	How easy is it to find the COVID-19 information from the main page.	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	A	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	
	24	How easy is it to navigate the coronavirus information.	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	A	G	G	G	G	G	G	A	

Mark scheme
Information is...
Green
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly worded
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to find
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correct
Amber
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present but difficult to find/too many clicks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Had to use google or site map to find it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wording not as clear/helpful as it could be
Red
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not present
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information incorrect
N/A
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not applicable