



Transport User Community

National Rail personalised disruption messages

April 2021

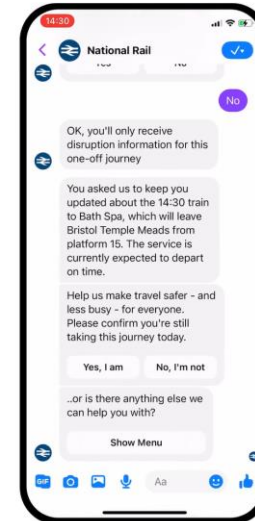
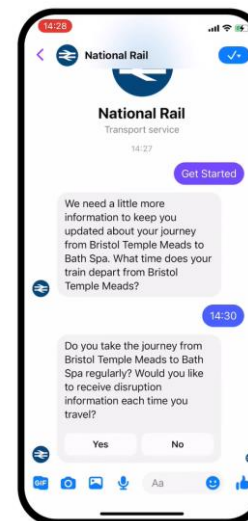
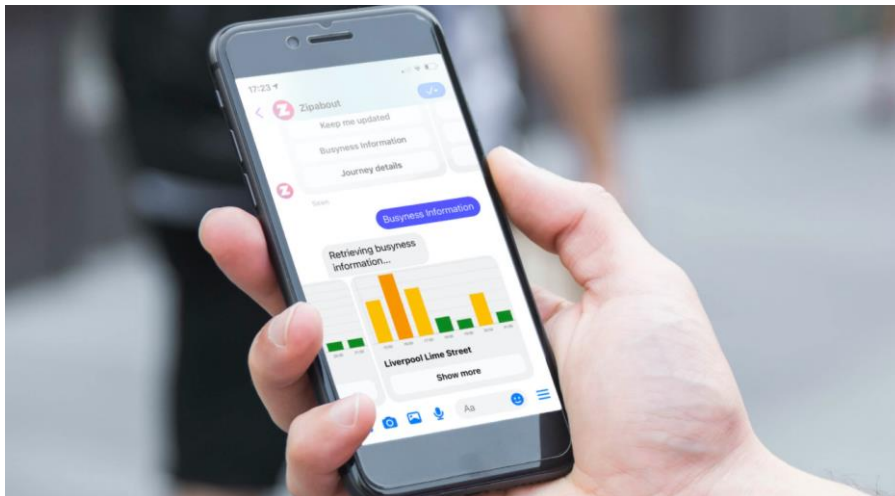
What did we ask our community?

National Rail personalised disruption messages

A task to understand how passengers normally check for journey information or get updates for issues around disruption. What are the pros and cons of those methods?

Once this was established, respondents were asked to evaluate the ZipAbout service that provides personalised, real-time alerts for disruption and crowding on behalf of train operators.

We showed the community a video illustrating the capabilities of the tool and respondents were then invited to have a go at using the tool themselves.



Executive summary

Passengers' key priorities for information are around disruption and planning for alternatives

- The communities currently access their journey information primarily online through a variety of sources that each have their pros and cons.
- At present, respondents have to constantly check and re-check their chosen app to answer the question they most need answering.

The Zipabout messenger tool was unanimously well-received and meets respondents' need to know whether or not there has been an unexpected delay

- The service was seen as very simple and easy to use, and the link to National Rail Enquiries was a marker of reliability.
- A key benefit of the service was its perceived ability to reduce crowding, which is a primary concern for many at the moment.
- Respondents identified a few improvements that could further enhance the service but were fundamentally very impressed with the tool.

Who is in our rail and bus communities?

60|60

60 people using rail to commute and 60 using bus prior to Covid-19



Across England, Scotland and Wales



Mix of payment methods



Mix of those currently using public transport and those not



A spread of age, gender and ethnicity



Some have disabilities

How do passengers currently access information about their journeys?

Google Maps



Pros

Easy to access, intuitive, familiar. Answers the key questions around departures and expected journey times.

Cons

Unreliable around journey disruption. Some sense that the information is 'second-hand' and therefore less reliable

Transport provider apps



'Straight from the source' information, supplemented by reliable information around disruption.

Less helpful for more complex journeys across multiple modes or operating companies.

Twitter



An easy-to-access way of 'double-checking' information for routine journeys. Has anything gone wrong?

Limited use case. Must be used in conjunction with other apps apart from the most routine of journeys.

National Rail Enquiries



Comprehensive information for even the most complex journeys.

Time-consuming to use, less access to real-time alerts or notifications (perceived.)

I normally check my transport apps for any delays. Often they tell you that there are cancellations and when the next train or bus is due. However it would be good if they told you the reason for delay, that way you could decide early whether it's worth seeking an alternative form of transport.

Male, 46, North West (Bus)

I usually check transport apps and the Metrolink website before embarking on any journeys. Pros are that they tell you what you need to know but I tend to find that the information regarding how long a delay will be isn't entirely accurate but this cannot be helped at times as with any disruption the information is fluid.

Male, 25, North West (Bus)

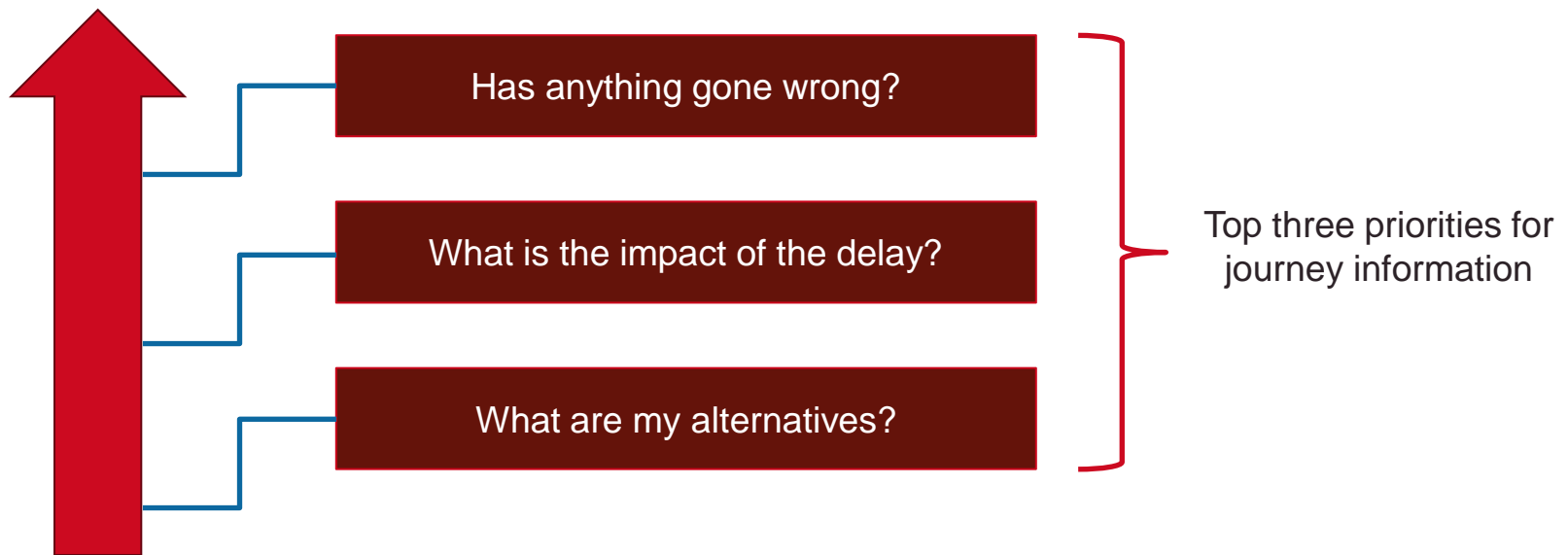
I use the websites of the various transport companies or the mobile phone app. This can be problematic as it is not every day and sometimes a disruption can occur without me knowing. The apps are good as they sometimes send notifications.

Male, 41, North West (Rail)

What are passengers' priorities for journey information?

Across both rail and bus, the key priorities were around potential disruption, and planning for alternatives. This reinforces our other research on disruption.

Most passengers wanted to be aware of their viable alternative routes **before they travel**. The communities plan for the worst when it comes to journey information, anticipating a delay, cancellation or diversion, and will want to see this reflected in their journey planning tools. The reassurance that a route is running smoothly is valuable information in and of itself.



Yes I do check. I have a ScotRail App and this can tell me if trains are running on time. The three important things are checking my journey is if it is running on time or how late it is, which platform this will be leaving from especially if I am having to change trains, and if there is busy carriages and which ones were less busy.

Female, 57, Scotland (Rail)

I would do this on the morning of the journey, usually not after work though and I would do this on a train app. For a longer one off journey like Manchester to London, I would check this the night before and day of travel for both journey's. It's best to know if there's a delay before I leave so can look at other arrangements or let work know I'll be late as early as possible for example.

Female, 25, North West (Rail)

I use the websites of the various transport companies or the mobile phone app. This can be problematic as it is not every day and sometimes a disruption can occur without me knowing. The apps are good as they sometimes send notifications.

Male, 46, North West (Rail)

The personalised disruption messaging concept was almost unanimously well-received

Fundamentally, the service meets respondents' need to know whether or not there has been an unexpected delay

At present, respondents have to constantly check and re-check their chosen app to answer the question they most need answering.

The Zipabout service was seen as exceedingly simple and easy to use. Respondents are familiar with push notifications and messenger services and do not anticipate any issues with accessing the service.

The fact that it interfaces with National Rail Enquiries was seen as a marker of reliability: the information is simply being relayed 'from the source', but keeping the user on one app rather than switching across multiple.

As a result of this task, many respondents were willing to trial the service on their own phones.

One major benefit of this service was its perceived ability to reduce crowding by stopping passengers from making journeys affected by disruption.

I've never used this service before but it sounds good to me! I feel it would give updates to your phone which everyone always has on them. I feel it is trying to be more user friendly and up to date with the customers. I would definitely use this when I traveled anywhere – I love it! I would want to access it through the website to a messenger or notification app.

Female, 25, North East (Rail)

I would use it and i think it would encourage passengers back to trains, as it provides a more professional service especially if they are anxious about getting a train in the first place, hanging around stations longer than necessary and at least if the train is going to be crowded you've been warned in advance.

Female, 53, North West (Bus)

I would probably use this service but only if it is faster at giving me real time information than what any app would do. I would only use it when I knew I was making a specific journey, I would not like to be hounded by messages about journeys I am not taking.

Male, 25, North West (Bus)

Respondents identified potential improvements or reassurances that could be made to the service

Again, the ZipAbout service was very well-liked indeed. These small changes may, however, add value:

- Easily interchangeable “schedules” to allow users to switch between notifications for different shift patterns or work commitments
- Being able to switch between 24-hour and 12-hour clock formats
- Tailored information around station facilities like toilets or accessibility features
- Updates on how crowded the bus or train will be. Will it become more or less crowded as the journey progresses, and will the initial estimate of crowding hold true?
- Avoiding excessive requests for passenger feedback on crowding
- SMS updates if the user is low on data or lacking access to Wi-Fi – perhaps for the most critical updates (major service disruption)
- More clarity around what “busy” means. The key question is, “is it too busy to travel safely?” and respondents tend to expect a yes or no answer.

I would use it to plan my trip and would want to access this service without need for mobile data to be used on my phone, but realise this is not likely possible. Would be great if it was a free to use service - not requiring internet connection but through mobile signal.

Female, 41, South East (Bus)

I've never used this before but I think it looks great. If it was updated in real time and it can be accessed on your phone then it would be great for people on the move to keep up to date. Rather than logging in each time to check for updates, if they were sent straight to your phone this would be a huge advantage. I would definitely use this in the future!

Female, 27, Scotland (Rail)

I like the look of it. Seems really easy to use and means I don't have to be ducking in and out of apps to check the status of my train/bus. I'd want any messages just to be focused on my journey and would be reluctant to use it though if I ended up getting bombarded. I think it's designed to let you know if there are delays or particular services which are busy, this is very useful at the moment where people will want to socially distance as much as possible.

Male, 41, South East (Bus)

Both Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp were well-received as platforms for the service, with some drawbacks



- ✓ Simple, easy to use
- ✓ Some sense that it updates more readily than WhatsApp in poor-Wi-Fi/reception scenarios
- ! Significant concerns about Facebook's privacy credentials. A large number of respondents have deleted Facebook.



- ✓ Trusted, encrypted, confidential
- ✓ Simple, easy to use
- ✓ Could enable ZipAbout to make SMS contact in the case of extreme disruption (if such a feature were available)
- ! Some worry about giving ZipAbout access to their mobile phone number.

While Messenger and WhatsApp could have similar issues as they are both owned by Facebook, the community was not necessarily aware of this.