



Planning journeys

Research by Transport Focus and Traveline

December 2021

What do transport users want from a journey planner?

Transport Focus and Traveline have worked together to understand what transport users want from a journey planning tool and what they think of Traveline’s existing products.

The purpose of this research is to ensure that transport users’ views – those currently using public transport and those not – shape how Traveline develops its role as a provider of multi-modal journey planning information.

The Traveline website is well received. It is liked for having a clean, attractive look and feel, as well as for its clarity. Many felt Traveline is ideal for getting a better understanding of the public transport networks available to them. However, opportunities were identified to make

the user experience more intuitive in some areas and to give more prominence to particular features.

Traveline will use this research as it considers its development priorities in the context of carbon net zero targets, the Government’s bus strategy for England and changes in travel patterns as a result of Covid-19. Traveline may ask Transport Focus to carry out further research among current and potential public transport users as it develops its plans.

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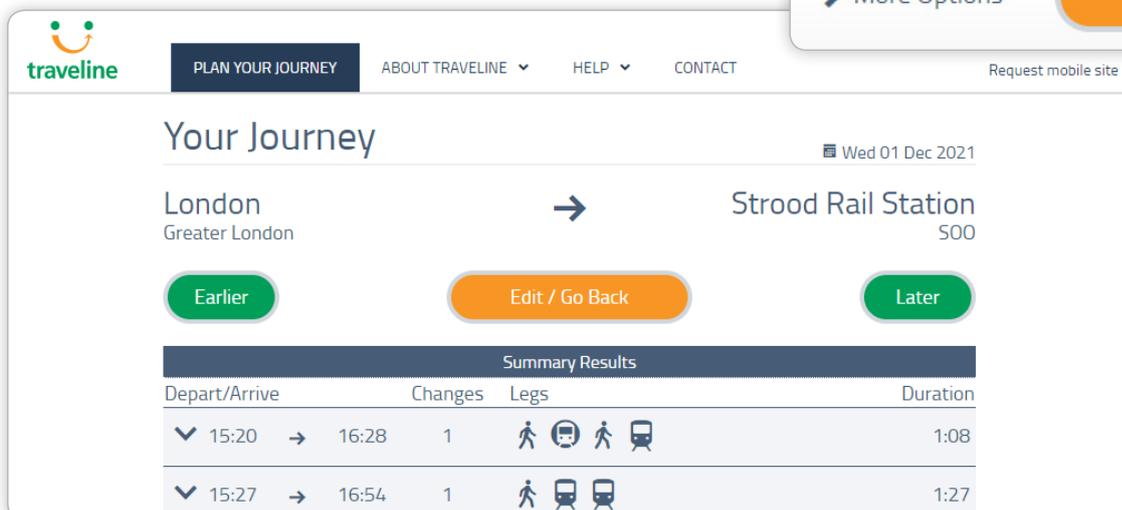
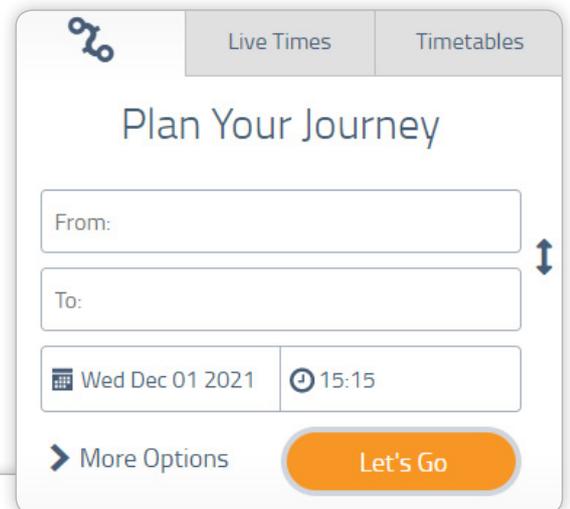
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Background

Traveline provides integrated, multimodal route journey planning through its website (www.traveline.info) and worked with Transport Focus to better understand how passengers use, obtain and process travel information when planning and undertaking journeys.

This document summaries the findings of qualitative research intended to help Traveline decide how to enhance what it provides and ensure current and future needs are met.



Research findings

Journey planning context

Forms of journey planning

Journey planning typically takes four forms, each with its own core information needs:



• **Strategy:**
whether to travel and the best way to do so.

For this the core information needs are: service frequency, times, station/bus stop locations, interchange information.



• **Optimising:**
ways to travel more quickly and cheaply.

For this the core information needs are: journey speed, fare information and alternative options.



• **Checking:**
seeking up-to-the-minute updates on problems to avoid disruption and to successfully execute the journey.

For this the core information needs are: information about disruption, road conditions and crowding.



• **Planning hypothetical journeys:** **researching options ahead of a journey that may or may not be taken.**

For this the core information needs are: locations of stations/stops and information about the extent of the service.

Ideally, all of these forms of planning would be covered by a single journey planning tool.

Attitudes to journey planning

Attitudes to journey planning vary according to how familiar somebody is with a journey and its complexity.

The research identified four main types of journey:

- simple, familiar: just 'turn up and go' journeys.
- more complex but still familiar: 'in the moment checking' is key for these journeys
- less complex, unfamiliar: planning these journeys involves comparing prospective routes for their feasibility (for example cost, time and reliability)
- more complex, unfamiliar: the least common type of journey, these typically involve gathering the maximum amount of information possible to help decision making.

It is worth noting that longer journeys increase the importance of cost considerations and are often 'higher stakes' trips.

Use of travel information sources

Those taking part in the research used a range of sources because no one tool met every need. There were some common themes:

- Operator-specific apps were very common among bus and rail passengers where getting the information 'straight from the source' felt most appropriate and accurate. Most bus users were highly familiar with their local route and tended to just 'turn up and go' rather than plan their trip.
- Google maps is used as an 'anchor' between other travel planning tools, with GPS tracking that helps the user stick to the itinerary.
- Trainline has fundamentally changed users' expectations of how a journey planning tool should work. Respondents particularly appreciated being able to plan a journey, check fares and purchase tickets all in one place.
- CitiMapper is popular for planning holidays abroad but is also often used in Britain, too.
- Touch-based devices have overtaken computers for journey planning, with tablets or smartphones preferred by all ages. Among our sample there was little or no use of offline resources such as AA maps.

Specific information requirements

Passengers with a physical disability or travelling with children or luggage have specific information requirements:

- for users with a disability the availability of seating and real-time crowding information, alongside core accessibility information, is key
- those travelling with children need information concerning walking distances involved, as well as about luggage/equipment storage facilities and the availability of seating.

Traveline user experience

Location summaries

Reaction to the Traveline website differed in the four research locations and was influenced by how adequate public transport is perceived to be in each location.

Those in areas with lower levels of public transport provision tend to require up-to-the-minute updates about disruption. In addition, those in rural areas tend to combine private car and public transport, so integrating road and public transport is important. For respondents in these areas, a journey planning tool that helps with decisions about whether to take the car or to use public transport is desirable.

Research in different locations shows how the use of Traveline varies:

- Manchester: Traveline's offer was most successful in aggregating and providing a handy summary of the range of options in Manchester's multi-faceted, multi-operator transport system.
- Preston: Traveline was least well received in Preston due to perceived low provision of public transport and low confidence in the reliability of local services. For local users checking up-to-the-minute information on an app is felt to be key. The desirability of combining public and private transport into a single journey planner was highlighted.
- Brighton: local journeys tended to be familiar, limiting the need for Traveline. Information direct from local operators was seen as most useful to find out about potential disruption. Reflecting rail's role in the area, the most used app was Trainline which is popular because you can both check train times and buy tickets.

- Exeter: local journeys made up a large part of travel in this area. The Stagecoach app was well liked for its information on live bus times and bus locations in real time. Traveline was seen as well suited to help in the choice of bus or train.

Detailed user experience

Well-received features

Respondents were highly positive about the following aspects of Traveline:

- Traveline's overall look and feel was warmly received and seen as pleasant and clear with a clean and seamless user interface
- the title page was inviting and attractive and clearly signified the purpose of the site and expectations of the user
- the overall 'sleekness' of the site is valued
- the journey summary was seen as concise and clear
- the journey detail was considered to be better laid out than on other websites
- those able to use the filter system to plan their journey were very positive about this feature
- OpenStreet Map used by Traveline was well received and seen as appealing for exploratory use, as well as providing a way to compare public transport with car usage.

Opportunities for improvement:

Respondents identified the following opportunities for improvement:

- The site presentation could more clearly highlight that it can be used for local journeys (as well as longer ones) and the fact it is, primarily, about public transport in its various modes.



- Detail is valued and more signposting to additional features such as 'Live times' or 'Timetables' would be a significant benefit.
- There is potential to provide a more intuitive experience by improving predictive text in the origin and destination fields and adding prompts to help identify destinations and filter for the most likely options.
- In places, the language used could be clearer and more user-friendly. For example when looking up timetables, terms such as 'bus number', 'postcode' or 'town' were seen as more straightforward than the currently used 'locality' and 'service number'.
- The modal icons could more clearly differentiate between London Underground, National Rail and buses.
- Providing up-to-date journey timings is greatly valued. It was felt this feature could be incorporated into the 'plan journey' process to make it more accessible and intuitive.
- The addition of live rail times would be welcomed by some rail users.
- The journey summary could be extended to provide further details about cost and complexity. The succinct style of the 'duration' summary is liked and it was felt this approach would work well applied to cost and complexity information.
- The usefulness of 'long form' bus timetables depends on how familiar a respondent is with reading a conventional timetable.
- Accessibility information could be more detailed and displayed in a way that prompts users to check the further details and caveats under the 'fully accessible' category.
- Twitter was not seen as a useful source of up-to-the-minute passenger information as this is highly variable and dependent on the operator doing it promptly.
- While the Traveline logo is well recognised, it could be clearer that there is a website as well as a telephone enquiry service.

Priorities for improvement

Overall, the research identified the following priorities for improvement:

- Creating a Traveline app was cited most often as a priority. This is seen as the most convenient way to check for journey updates on the move, especially since passengers currently use several journey planning tools in tandem.
- Improving predictive text and enhancing the ease of navigation would help to increase trust.
- The ability to purchase tickets is key for many.
- Up-to-the-minute updates and information about disruption is of universal importance.

Summary

The Traveline website is well received. People liked it for its clean, attractive look and feel, as well as for its clarity. Many felt Traveline is ideal for getting a better understanding of the public transport networks available to them. However, opportunities were identified to make the user experience more intuitive in some areas and to give more prominence to particular features.

Those planning journeys are often using a mix of tools. Popular sources include local operators which were considered best for up-to-the-minute information about potential disruption (Stagecoach was mentioned for its real-time bus information), and Citimapper. For longer distance journeys, National Rail is used for up-to-the-minute information while Trainline is well regarded for providing fare information and the ability to purchase tickets all in one place. Google maps is the most popular GPS app and is used to 'anchor' information from other sources.

Key opportunities for improvement include:

- For all journeys: the functionality for 'checking' a journey either on route or immediately before.
- For longer journeys: providing fare information enabling users to minimise costs, alongside the ability to purchase tickets at the same time.
- For more complex journeys: providing the reassurance of a GPS and live, up-to-the-minute travel updates through an app.

How we did the research

Research was carried out in 2020 among users and potential users of Traveline. They were located in Preston, Manchester, Brighton and Exeter. There were six focus groups comprising six to eight individuals each, and 12 in-depth interviews. Some respondents were asked to complete an online task after participating in the research.

Participants were a mix of ages and familiarity with digital technology. Some frequently planned journeys others did not. Some made long journeys, others short ones. Some were familiar with Traveline and others were introduced to it for the first time.

Contact Transport Focus

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Transport Focus is the operating name of the Passengers' Council